

*Love
for an Hour
is Love
Forever*



Amelia E. Barr



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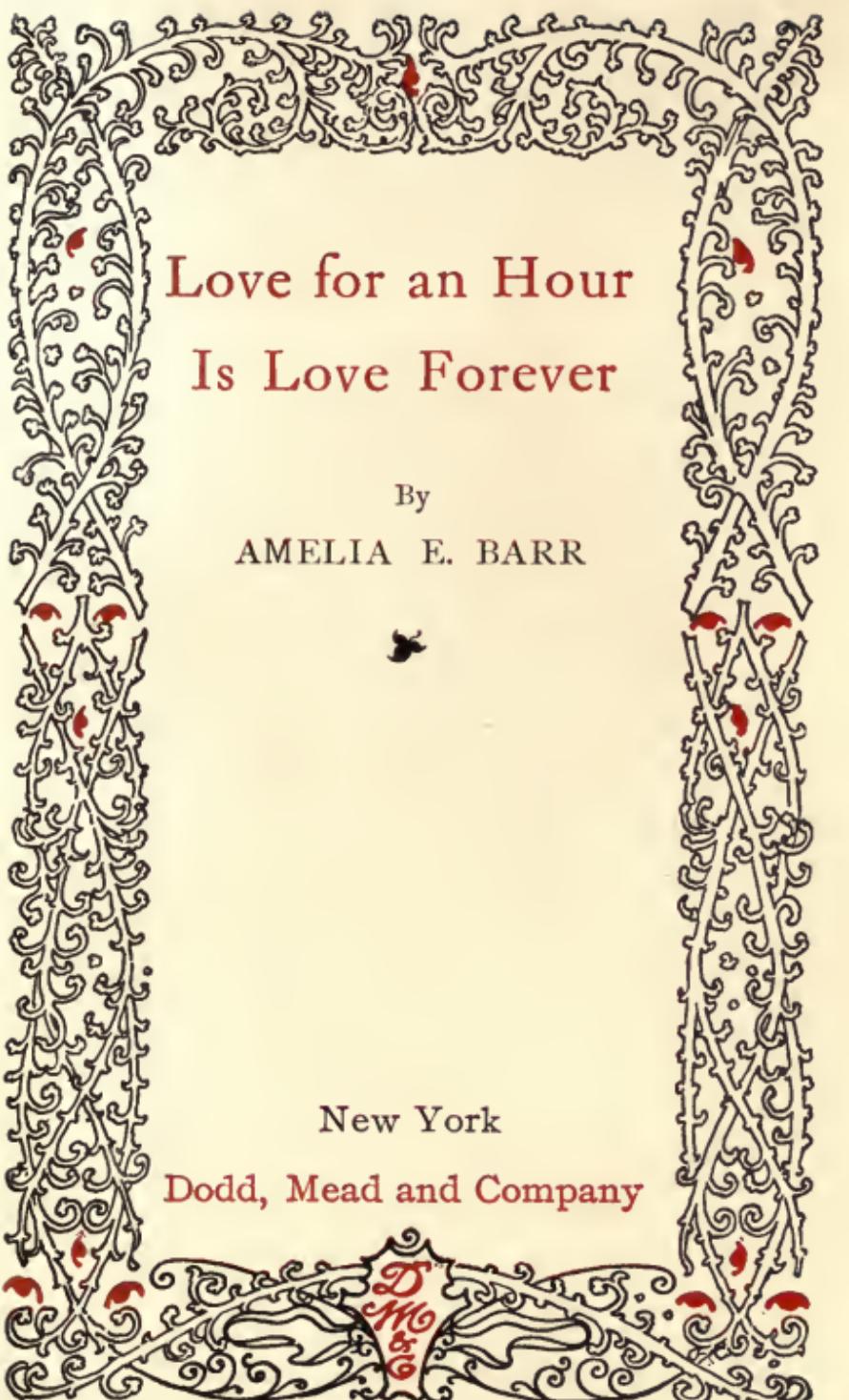
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LONG BEACH,

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Love for an Hour
Is Love Forever

By
AMELIA E. BARR



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LOVE FOR AN HOUR IS LOVE FOREVER.

CHAPTER I.

“WHO RIDES BY WITH ROYAL AIR?”

“Who rides by with royal air?”

“Though fate may frown, and death may sever,
Love for an hour is love forever.”

BETWEEN the leaves of an old romance I found one day the shadow of a lily and a song. The lily grew forty years ago, the song was sung as it was gathered. The flower is nearly dust, the words have nearly faded away, but the story they keep is unforgotten. For in becoming “Life” it made itself eternal.

Before the flower bloomed, before the song had found a voice, Francesca Atherton had dreamed of love, as saints dream of heaven—wonderful, mystical, far off—an object both of fervent desire and of wistful fear and uncertainty. For her young life had been peopled from noble books, and it was in their pages she had met her friends and companions—men, romantically honorable and loyal; women, faithful in love, even unto death—

both alike doing nobly with this life, because they held it as the gage for life eternal.

And Francesca believed these shadowy forms to be portraits of the people whom she would one day meet in the world. No one told her differently. Her aunt—the still beautiful Loida Vyner—held the same opinion; for she had only made little holiday visits into the world, and she was quite ignorant of all that was mean or selfish in the pomps and vanities she took no part in. Gentle and romantic, carrying in her heart the “hush” of a great sorrow, Miss Vyner had brought up her motherless niece in that sweet, pious simplicity which makes a woman not only charming in good fortune but patient and strong in the days of calamity.

In this exquisite schooling of a young soul Squire Atherton had little part. He distrusted himself entirely where Francesca was concerned. He would have taken a son to the kennels and the ferret hutches, made him wise in stable lore, and taught him all the mysteries of woodcraft. The little maid, even at nine years old, puzzled him. Her eyes, full of solemn wonder, gave him an uncomfortable sense of incompetency. Her hand had but to clasp his finger, and he felt under an irresistible authority. And when her small face lay against his large, sunbrowned cheek, he had neither wish nor will of his own, to speak of.

“She is just a little lady! God love her!” he said to his sister-in-law, “and she must have a lady to guide her. As for me, Loida, thou knows, I would lay my hands under her feet.” And Loida, looking up at the man standing firm as an oak before her—massive, tall, tough, fearless—felt all the wonderful surrender in this

free expression of love, and of love's service—“*I would lay my hands under her feet.*”

If this was the squire's feeling when Francesca was nine years old, when she was nineteen it was ten years stronger. For he had then begun to realize that his child had become a woman, and that the high park walls of Atherton Court would not much longer keep away from her whatever Fate was waiting.

“And I'll tell thee what, Loida,” he said one day, as they sat talking, “if anything goes wrong with Francesca, the world will be just four bare walls to me.”

As he spoke he rose and went to the window. The leaded sashes were open, and a robin-redbreast, singing on an ivy branch, was almost in the room. The squire chirruped to the bird, but kept his eyes upon his daughter. She was coming slowly up the low stone steps of the terrace, lifting slightly her long white dress with one hand, and scattering wheat with the other to the many colored pigeons, who paced and plumed and bridled their opal necks, and “coo, coo, coo'd” around her feet.

He called to her, because he wished to hear her voice; and she let the wheat fall from her hand and lifted her hat with a joyous upward movement.

“Where have you been, Francesca?” he asked.

“I went to the south walls, to ask the apricots if they were ripe. And one—like roses and amber—told me to try it.”

“Was it good, dearie?”

“It was like sunshine and wine and musk-roses and—one of your kisses, dear father.” She was by this time at the open window, and she sent the compliment

straight to his heart, with a smile as ravishing as love and beauty could make it.

"Eh! but thy words are like music. I don't wonder the very birds love to hear them. Robin was singing till you came; now, like a wise bird, he is listening to thee."

"I have just been listening to the starlings. They have been holding a large public meeting. Do you think, father, that they are addicted to politics? No, it must have been a religious meeting. It was extremely orderly. There is a starling who lives in the east gable; he is quite a religious bird. I have often seen him on the topmost stone of the highest chimney gaze on the green earth and up at the blue sky, and then clap his wings softly, to the most joyful song you can imagine. He was singing to God, I am sure he was."

"I wouldn't wonder, dearie."

"Father, I walked through the park to the great gates. And I saw two gentlemen go past them. One was old, and one was young; that is, one was much older than the other; and they looked so happy, out there, in the world. I wished I was a man—even an old man—if I could only go riding up and down, as my fancy led me."

"I'll warrant it was their business, and not their fancy, that led them into this bit of country, Francesca. Why-a! They be coming here, my little lady. Go tell your Aunt Loida. They will need a bite and sup, whoever they be."

And she heard, as she went away, the trample of horses' feet, and the sound of men's voices, and that little flurry of formal welcome that marks the unexpected yet not unwelcome visitor. For visitors were

rare at Atherton Court, and the squire was glad to talk to those who brought to him for awhile the atmosphere of the busy world.

To Francesca their coming was also a little event. She felt a kind of personal interest in these strangers, she had seen them before any one in the house; and she was pleased when the ostler took away their horses.

"They are going to stay to dinner," she mentally commented, "and I wonder what I shall put on!" It was a delightful uncertainty to her; she opened first one and then another of the wide drawers in her ambry; and stood looking down at their contents. The scent of lavender stole softly out of them, and mingled with the sweet air of the room. And the sunshine fell on several pale-colored gowns, pink and amber, and blue and white. She could not tell which one was the prettiest, but it was quite an important question to settle; because a stranger was such a rarity. One of these might be a lord or a lover; might be *the prince* of all her fairylike love-dreams.

In the twinkling of an eye a girl's bright glance can see a great deal; and Francesca in a moment's space, from out of the green shadows in which she stood, had noticed the tall, graceful man who held his bridle so lightly, and who turned a handsome, dark face toward the dim beech alley, through which he must have seen her sauntering.

The dresses, crisp and fresh with the clear starching now gone out of use, lay across the snowy counterpane. She considered their claims with a divided heart; none pleased her above all others. "I shall have to shut my eyes and take what fortune sends me," she said, with

a low laugh of satisfaction. "We have to do that about many other things, I am sure."

Then she lifted her watch, and saw that it was only a little after eleven. "And dinner will not be served until two—perhaps until half-past two; for Ann Pierson will have to make a syllabub, of course. She thinks visitors come to Atherton to eat her syllabubs."

This primitive toilet divination was obviated by the decision of Aunt Loida, who immediately on entering the room perceived the dilemma, and met it.

"I would wear the pink muslin, Frances," she said. "It is sheerer and smarter; and you can go to the garden when you are dressed, and get some myrtle-leaves and white clematis. And black lace mitts, my dear. Be sure of the black lace mitts! They give an air of modesty to a young girl. They say to a gentleman: 'The tips of my fingers only, sir.'"

Francesca looked, with a smile, at the tips of her fingers, and said:

"If you please, aunt, for whom am I to wear pink muslin, and white clematis, and the limiting black mitts?"

"Our visitors are Mr. Stephen Leigh and his son."

"I never heard of them before. Did you? I hope they have not come about money. Every one now seems to come about money."

"They are very rich, and we owe them nothing. Mr. Leigh is a loom-lord. He lives to make woolen cloth. But that is neither here nor there. The younger man is extremely handsome, and, and—I am sure, Frances, you will be careful. I mean, dear—you will not let him make any impression—you know what I mean."

"Indeed, Aunt Loida, I do not know what you mean."

"Young people sometimes fancy they have fallen in love, when they have not."

"Why should you warn me about falling in love? Have I ever done such a thing? Is it a common transgression of mine? How many opportunities have I had to be so imprudent? Is 'imprudent' the word? Or should I use a stronger one?"

"I see that I have been unwise in speaking to you, Francesca."

"You should not have spoken on this subject. I am nearly nineteen years old, Aunt Loida."

"It is such an important subject! O Francesca, such a fateful subject! It makes or mars human lives in a few moments. I am 'one of those who know,' my dear."

Miss Vyner's still face flushed, and she dropped her eyes upon her gray silk dress and smoothed out a fanciful crease.

It was the first approach to confidence ever given, and Francesca went to her aunt's side and took her hand. Some vague tradition of Loida Vyner's disappointment in love had floated into her consciousness almost imperceptibly, but the idea had always been pale, remote, and without much meaning. At this moment she had a revelation that troubled and restrained her, and a spell of sadness fell between the two women.

It lingered in the room after Miss Vyner had left it, and Francesca was a little impatient of the feeling. She began to sing softly, but ere she was aware her voice had slipped into a monotonous air, full of old world sad-

ness. Then she broke it off suddenly, and, in a quiet hurry, finished her toilet. For once she forgot to take a little pleasure in her own beauty—to watch in the two long mirrors the graceful sweep of pink muslin across the dark oak floor; to notice the gleam of her white arms and throat; the heavy braids of her nut-brown hair; the rose-like tints of her face, and the sparkling lights of her large gray eyes. But it was only one o'clock, and she could go to the garden and get flowers, and do all these things in that final five minutes before dinner.

As she passed through the hall, she heard her father talking. His voice had an argumentative ring; it was clear and positive.

“Now I know what these people have come for,” she said to herself; “politics. I dare say this Stephen Leigh is a Radical, for father never talks that way but when somebody is saying something against the Conservative government.” As soon as she had settled the visit upon a political basis, her spirits rose; the decision put away some unacknowledged money care.

With a light step she went down the terrace into the pleasant stretch of odorous shrubs and blossoming flowers. Here there were all kinds of shady alleys; rose hedges shut in some, and the laburnums' rain of gold and the climbing honeysuckle others; and lower down toward the steps of the second terrace there was a thick screen of white clematis. It covered also a little summer-house overlooking the steps and the hilly sward in which they were set; and lower down, the place of summer fruits. The desire to enter the summer-house was irresistible. It was so cool, and then the

light was so green there, and her pink dress made such a charming glow in its dim shadow. She spread it out with an obvious childlike pride in the contrast.

Oh, the stillness! Oh, the sweet smell of growing wood; of the soil; of the flowers; of the ripening fruit! Youth has a sensuous hunger for such alluring odors, and Francesca sat and closed her eyes, the better to enjoy them. The chair was her father's chair; it was large and soft; the air was the noontide air, it was warm and sleepy; her soul was in the mood of a truant, and it slipped away into the land of dreams.

She awakened suddenly, as if she had been sharply called. All the lower space of the fruit garden was full of sweetest melody:

"I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls."

That was very like what she had been dreaming. She rose quickly to her feet, a warm crimson wave rushed over her throat and face, her eyes grew larger and darker, she parted the clematis vines and looked through them.

A young man was slowly walking between the plum and the apricot standards, and singing as he walked. His voice had magic in it. The tender, ringing tones, now sharp and clear, then soft and lingering, came floating up the terrace and went straight to her heart. She had heard the first verse of the song in her sleep—never before—and the second verse had an insinuating familiarity she could not resist.

The singer came slowly onward, taking the terrace-steps with a charming deliberation. He held an apricot, and he threw it lightly from one hand to the other,

making the act as rhythmical and graceful as the melody he sang to the movement. He was bare-headed, slender and tall, and carried himself with a royal air. As he came closer, she saw that he was very handsome; that his mouth was sweet and smiling; that his clothes had the gloss of fashion. He stood a moment on the topmost step; stood in the sunshine singing, serenely glad, and wearing the look of a man who had always lived in the sunniest places of human happiness.

Francesca would have fled, but flight was now impossible. She could only tremble with fear and shame, only reflect that he would be sure to think she had come there purposely to watch him. She forgot even to sit down, and thus give the idea, at least, of indifference. Putting together the parted vines, she stood very upright, facing the leafy entrance. Her left hand was dropped, her right hand grasped the back of the large chair. Pinker than her muslin gown was her face; her eyes shone like stars; her manner expressed forcibly the confusion of a soul surprised in its very citadel.

For a moment the singer and the listener looked straight into each other's eyes. Something impelled them to this recognizance. Then Francesca said:

"I am Miss Atherton."

And the stranger said:

"I am Lancelot Leigh."

And she gave him just the tips of her fingers, and they went through the garden together. And the white clematis were never gathered, which was a fortunate thing, for the free flowers of the gadding vine hold no love-spell in their wide-open cups. There was one hour before dinner, and love for an hour is love forever—if

it be true love. These two souls had just found each other, and they had so much to say, and seemed to choose such unmeaning words that any one not of the faculty of love would have been puzzled at their satisfaction. A few syllables and a glance—a glance and a flower—one step at a time, and the touch of their hands—these simple vehicles of understanding held a measureless contentment. And when they took the terraced steps together, the tips of their fingers had a language all their own—mystically sweet as the influences of the Pleiades, mystically binding as the virtues of Orion. They were talking of names at the time, and he said, softly:

"I am called Lancelot."

She answered:

"I am called Francesca."

He repeated the word slowly—"*Francesca!*" and every letter was vivid as light, and the name went to his brain like wine.

What did it matter to them that they were late to dinner, and that the squire, with a slow dignity that was almost a reproof, told them so? What did it matter that he looked annoyed, and Aunt Loida anxious, and that the conversation was confined to the elder gentlemen, and was painfully political. The great point was that dinner would so soon be over, and that they must then learn for the first time how hard it is to spell the word "parting." Francesca could make no attempt to do it. She turned white, and remained dumb. Lancelot touched her fingers again, and said, "Good-night;" and, if his eyes lied not, said many sweeter words.

Francesca did not doubt them. All of love, and of love's confession that sprung from their beautiful depths, she implicitly believed. And, though it was yet a secret between their happy souls, she was certain the hour for its translation into mortal language would come—would surely come.

As soon as his visitors were out of sight, the squire gave way to his natural temper. He turned sharply round, went into his parlor, and filled a fresh "yard of clay" with his strongest tobacco. Miss Vyner let him puff some of his annoyance into smoke ere she asked the irritating question :

"What is the matter with you, Rashleigh? You act as if you were vexed at something."

"I *am* vexed at something. Whatever does thou think of a cotton-mill near Atherton?"

"A mill! Why, Rashleigh! Never!"

"That is what brought Stephen Leigh to my house. He was sure he could buy me over; he thought I would sell him Atherton Dingle; he talked about 'water-power' as if water-power was God Almighty."

"You would not sell the Dingle?"

"Not for gold. And nobody shall make gold out of its silver water and nodding bluebells if I can stop them. Why-a! there isn't a tree in Atherton would not whisper 'Shame!' to me if I sold Atherton Dingle for a mill village."

"He must have been a little trying to you."

"He was very trying. But thou may be sure I gave him some words that had more strength than grace in them."

"I should not wonder if you did."

As this moment Francesca came into the room, and the squire, having had a taste of sympathy, longed for more. He turned to his daughter with an air of injury :

"Whatever dost thou think brought the Leighs here, Francesca?"

"Politics, I suppose."

"My joy! Thou art wrong this time. They want me to sell the Dingle."

He expected to see her face flame and to hear her passionately protest. She only looked with curiosity and interest in his face, and so waited for further information.

"Yes, joy! They wanted to build a mill there—a great ugly cotton-mill!"

"Would not that be a good thing, father?"

If she had struck him, the squire could scarcely have been more angry and amazed.

"If thou hast no more sense and feeling than to speak in such a way as that, I had better hold my peace to thee."

"But mills make money, father, and some of our people are very poor."

"Poor! Not they! Thou should see the squalid, murmuring poverty of a mill village. The poor in our farm villages are decent. They don't live in cellars and alleys. They have their cottages on the fell-side, and a garden-plot, and a hive of bees, and a few sheep, and they go to church, and serve God, and do their duty. But if thou, Francesca—a lady of the land—art going to side with mill-men and such like, I may as well slip into my coffin and be done with everything!"

CHAPTER II.

“TAKE CARE, MY LAD, TAKE CARE!”

“Lovers have said these things before,
Lovers will say them evermore.”

“Don’t thee marry for money,
But go where money lies.”

STEPHEN LEIGH was the owner of the great mill at Little Garsby, a village that lay among the Ingleton Falls, on the borders of what was once the loneliest and loveliest portion of the West Riding. But steam had found out its abundance of water and ready facilities, and gradually its hills and valleys had been blotched with mills and all its sparkling waters made to toil and spin.

The Leighs were sons and daughters of the soil; strong, individual, elemental men and women, whose prejudices were convictions, and whose opinions, likes, and dislikes, being self-evolved, were in reality a part of each existence, and not to be surrendered except with the life of which they were the expression.

For many centuries the Leighs had lived at Leigh Farm, a large, rambling, gray stone house, covered with trained fruit trees. The branches framed the low, wide windows of lozenge-shaped glass; and the house stood in a pleasant garden, and was surrounded by meadows and cornfields. Stephen Leigh had made

some fine additions to it, but the old English character of the house had been preserved; and even the interior decorations, though handsome and costly, sustained in a satisfactory manner the ancient character which belonged to the place.

Until the middle of the present century, the Leighs had been farmers, and were known far and wide as great horsemen—

"Shrewd Yorkshire tykes,
Who, dealing in horseflesh,
Had never their likes."

Stephen's father had begun weaving in a small way, and with but a half-heart. Stephen threw all his faculties into the business, and he had made himself a rich and influential man. Unfortunately, the possession of more money than his business required developed in him a passion for investment and speculation that kept his more legitimate gains in constant danger and his wife Martha in perpetual fear and irritation.

"We are rich people living night and day on the varry edge of ruin," was her frequent statement of their position.

This conviction made her go about her beautiful home with a soured and angry heart, for Leigh Farm was the very apple of her eye. She was a cousin of Stephen's; her mother had been a daughter of the house, and her own life had never consciously been spent outside its walls. From garret to cellar it was crowded with the belongings and the associations of her people.

That they were out of this world did not weaken their

influence over her. She spoke of the rooms Seth Leigh had built in Queen Anne's reign just as she spoke of those her husband had built in Queen Victoria's reign; and Cicely Leigh, who one hundred years before had shot a man discovered in the act of setting fire to her hay-ricks, was as real a person to Martha as was her own husband or son. She often went about her work talking to the shade of the valiant Cicely as if she was present; discussing with her the circumstances which led to the crime, and fully exonerating her for taking so fatal a reprisal.

The rooms that had been Cicely Leigh's were now Martha's; and the handsome resolute face of her ancestress followed her from them, and went with her about her daily duties, and was a *familiar* to Martha Leigh's imagination; though imagination was the quality which, above all others, she despised, being consciously the most practical and material of women; being unconsciously highly imaginative, and disposed to let her imagination work upon such spiritual instincts as she possessed.

She had married Stephen because he was a Leigh and the inheritor of the old house which she so dearly loved. For twenty years she had lived in it, her grandfather's favorite companion; and when the old man died and Stephen came to his place, she had not unwillingly accepted the new master's offer to remain at Leigh Farm as his wife. And the marriage had been a very happy one as long as Stephen was only making money. Children had died, and losses had come, but the balance of happiness and gold was in their favor, until Stephen had become so wealthy that the overplus of his gold was a

care. Then he began to speculate in railroad stock, and, being successful, the operation became irresistible to him.

His wife trembled for the reverses she was certain would come; and her perpetual worrying so far influenced Stephen as to make him resolve to build another mill. A mill at least was a tangible result, and if shares should tumble to nothing, the mill would be fast on its foundations, and be so much saved money.

Looking about for a location, he fixed his mind upon Atherton Dingle. That Squire Atherton would refuse to sell was a contingency he had not considered. All his life he had found money abase all altitudes and overcome all difficulties. He had never seen any adversity in which it could not at least find friends; nor any prosperity in which it was not a consideration. That a man with competent senses to manage his affairs should refuse a few thousand pounds for the sake of cascades and bluebells and pure air, seemed to Stephen Leigh either a piece of unmitigated folly, or of deliberate impertinence.

And he was half inclined to think Squire Atherton had been ridiculing his commercial, money-making respectability: "Putting a bit of fine scenery before a handsome four-story mill, that would be a credit and an ornament to any place, ay, to Atherton Court itsen. I made him a tip-top offer," he said, turning to his son Lancelot, with an air of inquiry.

"But he did not wish to sell the Dingle, father."

"Niver mind! He'll hev to sell, varry soon, if he goes on throwing good gold away wi' a toss of his head and a wave of his white hand, as he did to-day. But I'm not beat yet! Not I! I've said I would build a

mill on these fells, and I will. Bingley owns the land next Atherton's. I'll be bound Bingley will take my offer. Will a mill to the right of the Dingle be any better than one in it? Not a bit. And Atherton will be a few thousand pounds out of pocket—that's all."

"Did you tell him that you would go to Bingley?"

"Ay, I did. He said: 'If Bingley chose to sell, that could not give him leave or license to be false to his land and his old neighbors!'"

"I think, father, Squire Atherton may be right, from his point of view. If England is to remain what she has been, there must be a race of landed gentlemen. John Bull is a man of acres and country houses, of cornfields and stalled oxen."

"There is no call for England to remain what she is, or has been. She might be a goodish bit better. The old John Bull is varry nearly dead, my lad, and his sons hev learnt a thing or two beyond cornfields and stalled oxen. They hev gone into the money market, and into the manufacturing business. Bless you, Lance, there is no money in farming now."

"Perhaps Squire Atherton does not put money before everything else."

"Then he ought to do so. Pounds, shillings, and pence stand for all worth heving."

"You do not think so, father. They could not stand for Atherton Court, with its grand old rooms and gardens full of old associations."

"In the day of buying and selling, how much, my lad, will old associations bring?"

"Father, your words do not agree with your actions. Leigh Farm House is not a splendid home, though you

have spent a deal of money on it, but I have heard you say you 'would not give it in exchange for a palace.' And the big oak chair you will sit in is about as uncomfortable as a chair can be, but you prefer it to any other chair, and you permit nobody to use it but yourself."

"Wait a bit, my lad. When I am gone the way of my fathers, thou can stretch thy legs out of it. All the Leighs, when they hev been 'master,' hev sat in it. I think mysen good enough to fill their seat. I am mebbe better than most that came before. I hev done a deal for the old place, and I hev made the varry name of 'Leigh' stand for a bit of good cloth, all over that part of the world as knows what a bit of good cotton cloth ought to be. And I will tell thee something: It is not the landed gentry of England, nor yet Squire Atherton, thou art thinking about; it is Squire Atherton's bonny daughter. Bless thee, Lance, though I am on the cold side of fifty, I can see as far as thou can."

"In most directions you can see much further, sir. As for Miss Atherton, if you noticed her, you must acknowledge she is as lovely as a poet's dream."

"I set varry little by poets and their dreams. I could always do my awn dreaming, and thy mother isn't a bad sample of it. But I can tell thee one thing, and that is, thou need not bother thysen to dream of Miss Atherton. If thou does, thy dream will niver come true. Niver, in this world! Why-a! She is a lady of the land, and heiress of Atherton Manor, for the squire hes none but her. I hev no doubt she holds hersen as high as a peeress in her awn right does."

"She was not proud with me."

"Ladies like her do not carry their pride on their

tongue and in their fine clothes. I'll tell thee what, Lance—it is in their blood. It is part of their life and their breath. The cradle rocked it in them, and the spade will find it there to bury."

"For all that, I admire Miss Atherton, and I should like to win her love and her hand."

"I should not like it, and thou isn't going to try it. I'll not hev thee making a fool and a failure of thyself. I hev a right wife picked out for thee, whenever thou frames to settling down—a pretty maid, and a moneyed one."

"How can you choose a wife for me, father?"

"Well, I hev chosen a lot of other things for thee, all thy life long. I don't think a wife is beyond my stock of common sense."

"Every man likes to choose his own wife; that is natural, father. Even the robins that built under the eaves had their choice free in all the fields of air. And I am sure they impose no rich-plumed wife upon their feathered sons."

"I do hope and trust thou gives me credit for more sense than a robin-redbreast hes. And thy argument is all against thee, my lad. Robins marry robins. And I'll be obliged to thee to marry a bird of thy awn feather—a spinner's daughter, with a goodish bit of money. There are plenty to pick from. But for Lance Leigh to go courting a county lady, with an old estate and a pedigree still older, is varry like a robin-redbreast going to twitter its little song to my lady nightingale."

"Whom are you thinking of as a proper wife for me, father?"

"Maria Crossley."

"Oh!"

"Thou need not say 'Oh!' in that kind of King-of-England way. Thou isn't one by thyself, and none other like thee. And thou could go further and fare worse."

"I shall not go further at present. As for Miss Crossley, she is a very nice girl. I think mother likes her."

"It is hard to say who or what thy mother likes lately. I think sometimes she does not like me varry much. The stones and wood in Leigh House are more to her than the flesh and blood that it shelters."

"No, no, father! Mother loves the old home dearly, but you and myself much more dearly."

"I would not set a half-penny on that, Lance. Sell a rood of Leigh land, or a tree out of Leigh wood, or put a hundred pounds mortgage on the house, and thou would mebbe get thy eyes opened to the true state of that case. Thou sees she hes niver gone into the world, as thee and I hev done; she hes lived all her life inside the old walls, and I think she would find it hard to live anywhere else. If the dead ever came back, Lance, I should say thy mother hed come back for all the Leighs that iver lived before her. She knows their names, and what they did and what they didn't do; and if it wasn't for my awn father and mother, I could almost wish most of them hed died before they were born."

In such conversation, interrupted by asides arising from the peculiarities of the road, Stephen Leigh and his son, Lancelot, passed their journey. It was the gloaming when they reached home, and in the soft gray light the old stone dwelling had a very distinctive air; as if the generations of strong men and women who had lived there had left something of themselves and their

lives around it. The ivy climbed to the topmost chimney, and the swallows were silently executing marvelous movements above it. All else was so still and motionless, that it might have been a house in a picture.

They entered by a heavy oak door in the old portion, and were at once in a large parlor. Mrs. Leigh stood by a table with a Japan caddy in her hand, from which she was measuring tea into a silver tea-pot. She looked up as her husband and son entered. Her face was handsome but melancholy; and her eyes, though bright blue, were cold, almost cruel.

"Well, Martha!" said Stephen, in a conciliating manner.

"Nay, I think it is about as ill as can be. Whativer fool's errand hes ta been on to-day?"

Stephen answered in a tone of offense:

"I hope I am not as big a fool as ta likes to think I am, Martha. I hev been to try and buy a bit of land—thou is always for buying land, thou knows."

"Did ta buy it?"

"Why, no; the man was not willing to sell. I couldn't buy it without his permission, now, could I?"

"It was like thee to go after land that wasn't in the market; asking for land as a favor, when ta was going to pay a good penny for it, I'll be bound."

Then Lance said something to his mother, and she smiled coldly, but lifted eyes full of affection to him. Stephen had left the room, and Lance made a remark about it. Mrs. Leigh shook her head, but Lance followed his father to the stable, and the two men returned together. Stephen had still an injured air, and the meal was silent and formal.

After it Lance went to his own apartments. They were in one of the new wings, and occupied the second floor. He lit his cigar, flung wide the casements, and began to think of Francesca. Oh, how sweet, how loftily modest, how frankly kind she had been! How he loved her already! He whispered her name, and it was like the passing-by of violets. He thought of her, and she stood like a goddess, clear and fair in her own light. All other women passed out of his memory. There was no room for them. *Francesca!* Only *Francesca!* He was awake, yet dreaming, and that was his pleasure; dreaming of his love so chastely and so nobly that he could have told her every thought.

The room was a very handsome one, full of such treasures as young men who have plenty of money gather while they are at their college or on their travels. Usually, as he smoked, he was fond of walking about it, of rearranging its ornaments, or of looking into his books, or of standing before some favorite picture. But this night he could think only of that beautiful girl whom he had found waiting for him in the clematis arbor. Fate had sent her there; that fate which brings two hearts together, though they be as far as the East and the West from each other. To this idea he gave ready possession, and it filled him with a sweet and invincible hope.

After a little time his mother came to him. If she was alone, she often did so. Her knitting was in her hand, and she sat down by the window to catch the last rays of the gloaming.

"Mother," said Lance, "I have seen to-day the loveliest woman on earth."

"Oh, my lad! I count little by thy words. I have

heard that tale too often. In three months thou wilt say to me, some night: 'Mother, she is varry tiresome and selfish. I wonder I iver thought her pretty.' I know. There was Alicia, and Dorothy, and Harriet, and Jane—all of them without a marrow on earth or in heaven. Alicia tired of thee, and thou tired of Dorothy, and Harriet married a member of Parliament—which she said thou would never be—and Jane is to be married about Christmas, if not before."

"Jane Idle to be married?"

"To be sure she is—to a man from Batley, who makes shoddy—a fat man, with a red necktie and a blue vest and a mint of money. That's the kind when a girl is choosing a husband. A man like thee is fit only for sweethearting."

"And I once thought that Jane loved me and that I loved her. We said so to each other. What mistakes young men make!"

"Ay, and young women also. Now, Lance, open thy heart to me. Who is thy new angel?"

"Indeed, mother, she is an angel. I never before had the least desire to kneel to a woman. I never believed men who said they did so, either mentally or literally. Joe Dykes said he knelt to Rose Schofield. Joe said there were women who made a man feel that he would be happy to pay such homage, and Joe spoke the truth."

"Joe Dykes must speak for himsen and for thee. I niver saw a woman of that kind. *Niver!* If thy father had knelt down to me, I would hev sent him off without any words about it. It is varry hard work to make a Yorkshireman bend his head, let alone his knees. Notice a bit next Sunday, and thou wilt see what lofty airs

they put on, even in church. I can tell thee, that the clerk and the women hev always that part of the Litany asking mercy for 'miserable sinners' all to themsens. Happen some of the women kneel, as they should do, but the men! They stand up, and they sit down, and they put their heads in their hats—some of them—but they do not kneel. And I must say, I niver heard tell of thee 'kneeling' before. Now, pray, who dost thou want to 'kneel' to?"

"Squire Atherton's daughter—Francesca."

"I have heard Jane Idle speak of her. She was a school-companion of Jane's. I dare say she will be at Jane's wedding."

"What did you hear about her, mother?"

"Nay, nothing but what was proper enough. Jane said she was varry sweet and stately, mebbe a bit proud. She is a county lady, and is niver likely to marry thee, Lance. Where did thou meet her?"

"Father went to Atherton Court on business, and while he and the squire were talking, I walked into the garden. There was a pretty clematis arbor, and she stood there. Before I spoke a word—"

"She went right into thy heart, I'll be bound, Lance?"

"Yes, mother; without a word, as sweetly and silently as roses are born. One minute I did not know she was in the world, and the next minute she was all the world to me."

"I'll warrant thou wilt be making poetry about her. Now, what business had thy father at Atherton Court?"

"He wanted to buy some land of the squire."

"He'll buy land till he hesn't a penny left to buy bread with. He keeps me in hot water from day to

day, till I'm not mysen at all. Lance, if ta loves me, and all thou should love, get thee a wise-like wife and bring her here. If thou marries to please thy father, he will settle Leigh Farm upon thee and thy heirs forever; and I'll be out of this constant, aching uncertainty. Marry Maria Crossley, and he'll be that pleased thou can ask him for anything he hes. She is a varry nice girl, Lance."

"I could not marry Maria."

"But thou must, Lance. I told Maria to-day thou was varry fond of her."

"Mother, you should not have said so. I am not fond of her. I cannot marry any girl unless I love her."

"Love! Love! Love! I am weary of the word. It is nothing but an excuse for all kinds of selfishness. When thy father asked me to marry him, I knew it was the best thing for Leigh Farm, and I put all things behind that. Maria will gladly marry thee and come and live in this house with us. And Peter Crossley is a sharp man; he will make thy father secure this home to thee."

"I would do nothing against father, especially underhand. Crossley is not fit to even father in any way, and I will not marry Crossley's daughter and let Crossley dictate on the subject to my father."

"I do believe thou cares nothing at all for the house that has been the home of the Leighs for centuries. I am ashamed of thee."

"I do care for the house; but I care for my father and my honor and my love far more."

She rose passionately, and at the door turned with a flaming face, and said:

"Thy father! Thy honor! Thy love! Every stone in this dear house is worth the whole of them. Thy father is but one man. There are thousands of Leighs behind him. Thou will hev to go to *them*. Thou will hev to reckon with *them*. Take care, my lad, take care.

CHAPTER III.

THE SQUIRE AND THE SPINNER.

But this is human life—the war, the deeds,
The disappointment, the anxiety,
Imaginations, struggles far and nigh,
All human; bearing in themselves this good—
That they are still the air, the subtle food,
To make us feel existence.—*Keats.*

THE evils of poverty are evident and easily understood; those of wealth are more complex, but perhaps not the less trying. Martha Leigh really suffered as much in the supposed danger of a mortgaged home as if the mortgage was an accomplished fact. Yet there was really no obvious reason for her anxiety; for Stephen, though a bold and far-seeing speculator, was not an unwise one. All his investments were likely to bear the touch of time, and if they were permitted to ripen, to yield a wealthy return.

But women have neither the faith nor the patience for such money transactions. They demand certain and rapid results, and are not content unless some security on which they have set their hearts is placed beyond doubt. Martha Leigh felt that if Leigh Farm was absolutely secure she could be happy. But this was the one point Stephen was indisposed to humor her in. He had promised not to involve the old home, and he felt her perpetual anxiety to be a doubt of his honor, and an in-

sult to his own regard for those who were behind, and those who were to follow him.

And Stephen had masterful ways which might be criticised, but which no one felt able to interfere with. The enterprises he had begun he pursued, regardless of the opinion of his wife and family. They would acknowledge his wisdom some day; and he was satisfied to wait for his justification until financial returns deserved it.

In his own mind he had built the new mill, and seen its thousand looms toiling for his benefit; and he went steadily to work to realize his ideal. Squire Bingley sold him the land he wanted, and in a few weeks the great foundations were laid, and the mill yet to be was exercising a pronounced influence among the inhabitants of the lonely village. Men and women, looking forward to its better wages, refused to hire for long terms to their old masters. Speculative owners of land were already building cottages for the "hands." Shops of various kinds were in preparation, and subscriptions were being solicited for a Wesleyan Chapel.

These changes so barely indicated met Squire Ather-ton with painful distinctness. They grew day by day with irritating celerity. Every time he went beyond his own park gates he was aware of some intrusion of the new into the old. He blamed Leigh for all his annoyances. He met him frequently going to and fro, and as yet he always touched his hat to his enemy, with a kind of proud tolerance of the wrong done him. Leigh returned the courtesy, though often with an indifference which deeply offended the lord of the manor.

"I shall be nobody soon, even in my own village," he said angrily to Miss Vyner. "A few weeks ago, and

men and women would have sworn to live and die with me. Now it is Stephen Leigh whichever way I turn: what he is doing, and what he is going to do; what he has given, and what he is going to give. I tell thee, Loida, I feel very much as if I was being edged out of my own nest and place. It is too bad of Bingley. I will never forgive him! Never!"

"Indeed, Rashleigh, you need not fret about your tenants. If they have deserted you, they have also deserted the church into which they were all baptized. Gammer Oddy told me to-day that Leigh was going to build a chapel and some kind of an institute for the 'hands'; and she was rejoicing in such a way about them you would have thought there never had been a church in the parish, though she has been fed from it for many a year."

"And," continued the squire, "I saw that young man to-day who came here with his father. He was wandering around the park entrance, and I thought of Francesca and felt faint at heart. Do you think Francesca has been meeting him unknown to us, Loida?"

"Squire! Do I think shamefully of my niece? No sir, I do not. Francesca is incapable of anything clandestine."

"They met in the garden."

"What by that? The moment before they met, Francesca had not known of the young man's existence. She told me about their interview. He is a very pleasant young man, Rashleigh. You cannot say different."

"He is his father's son. I can say that."

"We must be just, Rashleigh. The father gave you the first offer. And when you refused it, he told you

plainly he must go to Bingley. He was very straightforward."

"I do not think, Loida, that a wrong being 'straight-forward' makes it any easier to bear."

"Oh, but it does! One would rather have a stab in the breast than in the back. But you need not fear Francesca will ever give you a back-blow. She has all the honor of her race, and all the native modesty of a pure, proud woman. You may send her into the world with a safe heart, Rashleigh."

"I was thinking of it. I know well that keeping a woman in a lonely place is no protection. God Almighty shut the first woman up in a garden, and even *He* could not keep her safe. I had a letter this morning from my friend Thomas Idle. His daughter Jane is going to be married, and he wants us to come to Idleholme. I cannot go, but thou might take Francesca. She will be the better for a change."

"Why cannot you go also?"

"I should leave myself behind. I can do nothing for nor against Leigh's mill, but I like to be on the spot. Something may turn up to my advantage or against it. Either way, I want to be ready and waiting."

"Have you thought about Almund Idle?"

"I have. Like cures like, and one love may cast out another. If Francesca has taken a liking to that son of Stephen Leigh's, young Idle may at least set it wavering. He is not a bad kind, I fancy, what I have seen of him."

"I know nothing of the family."

"They are good stock. I used to think no one was worthy of Francesca, but I feel now that it will be luck

enough to have her wed some one that I do not hate. This is a disappointing life, Loida. We are sure of such great things when we first begin to reckon up our treasure, and every day we have to count less, and give up here and take off there, until we are glad to get ten where we thought once to get a hundred. I used to think of a lord, at least, for my Francesca. I will be grateful now if she will only give me a son out of a county family that I can bear to see come in and out with any kind of pleasure."

"I wish you would not nurse a prejudice, Rashleigh. I am sure young Leigh made a great impression on Francesca, and her heart is not one to lose that impression readily."

"I am sure if she marries that young man she will never see my face again."

"Rashleigh!"

"I mean what I say. She may go to him, but she cannot bring him to me. No, no! My Frances will do nothing like that. She knows I hold his father as the worst enemy I ever had. Do you think she will open my house-door to the son? Will she dare to write his name among those of her own ancestors? It is not likely, is it, Loida?"

"Squire, I have seen this thing come to pass—men swear to themselves, and then find it right and just to forswear their oath. The world changes so fast now that no one can safely say: 'Next year I shall feel as I do this year.'"

"If it comes to feeling, Loida, how many years has thou been faithful?"

"When the loved one is absent and silent, he can

neither grieve nor wrong us. Then it is easy to be faithful. And what is life worth without love, Rashleigh?"

"A poor thing, Loida! It is earth without verdure, and it is bread without salt. Tell Frances to go to Jane Idle's wedding. Maybe nothing comes of it! A girl may go through the world and never meet a lover; and then some day, when she is safe at home, Love may come riding up and wreck her whole life. It is a very queer thing, but I have seen it so. I am going to the cover for an hour. When I am a bit put out it is relieving to fire a gun at something, is it not, Loida?"

She watched him out of sight, and then went to look for her niece. Francesca had gone to the village. No one knew why she had gone, nor yet why she had chosen to walk there. Indeed, Francesca could not herself have explained the "wherefore" of her whim. But it was an exquisite morning in October, and the sweetly insinuating melancholy of the season inclined her to put herself in touch with it. She pushed her feet through the faded grasses and leaves. She felt the perfume of the dying strawberry-vines, and it went to her heart like a psalm. The air was subtle, and the amber rays shone through the delicate mist as through an ethereal veil of air made visible. And all the time the church-bells were ringing slowly and softly—a grave harmony, swelling and dilating in the morning air. Now and then also a breeze—a mere puff—just lifted the dying leaves, and left her senses full of delicious perfume and languor—that intermediate melancholy which is at the root of all true happiness.

She wandered slowly onward, knowing no more why she did so than why in June she went to the rose-bushes

every morning to lay her face against the flowers, and taste their scent and feel the rose-dew on her lips. She was not thinking of anything, but her mind was in that quiescent state which good influences can inform. So she slowly strolled homeward, and was in a road where the interweaving branches of birches made a lace-work of trees against the sky, when she heard the quick gallop of a horse's feet. It roused in her no speculation, and gave to her heart no warning. Only when the rider drew rein and leaped to her side did she turn her eyes upon him.

It was Lancelot Leigh, and in the moment of their meeting Lancelot saw both love and joy flash into her face. It was swift as thought to come and go, but it made an unconscious community of feeling between them. With his bridle over his arm he walked by her side, saying only the commonest words, and yet charging them with all of love's subtle longing and unconscious worship. The first formal greetings over, there were a few moments of silence. Both were embarrassed.

It was Francesca who first began to talk with eager rapidity, on whatever subject was nearest to her.

"That is the wise robin," she said, as they passed the bird. "He sings as cheerfully among the scarlet haws in October as he did in March among the hawthorn flowers."

"I wonder if we shall be like him—as happy facing our life's winter as our youth's spring?" said Lancelot.

"I think we ought to be. My father was as happy as he could be, until—"

Then she suddenly remembered, and became silent.

"Until my father began to build the mill. I am so sorry about it. Will you believe me?"

"Yes; I do believe you."

"I would not give you—or any one you loved—pain. If you desired it, and the mill was mine, I would stop building this hour."

"Have you ever walked through Atherton Dingle?"

"No. I would like to visit it. Will you show it to me some day? I hear it is a little fairyland."

"Indeed it is. In May and June and July it is like that heavenly hill which God called 'Paradise.' The lights are so softly green, the little cascades leap so joyfully, and oh, the wild-flowers and the lady-ferns! They are beautiful beyond belief. To make its waters black with oils and dyes; to cover its flowers and verdure with the refuse of spinning-mills! How could any one think of such a desecration? I am sure Nature can suffer murder. The sod would feel the sharp spade, and the sweet flowers sadly give up their fair lives, and the waters mourn for their loss, for—

" 'Tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.'

Can you not feel this?"

"I feel every word you say, like a wound in my own heart. But, alas! to most men—

" 'A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose is to him,
And it is nothing more.' "

"We have both been quoting Wordsworth," said Francesca.

"People quote him almost unconsciously; he has so

many 'felicities.' I do not profess to be less practical than my age, but yet I prefer poets to philosophers, for—

“ ‘Philosophy will clip an angel’s wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air and gnomed mine.’ ”

“That is true,” answered Francesca. “There was an awful rainbow once in heaven. But we know its woof and texture, and have put it into the dull catalogue of common things. That is also a poet’s way of lamenting the practical life we now live. Do you hear the blackbird singing? It sings at noon when all the other birds are silent. I wonder if he is proud of his song.”

“I suppose so. What joyful creatures birds are. No wonder that Aristophanes makes them address men as—

“ ‘Naked and featherless,
Feeble and querulous,
Sickly, calamitous,
Creatures of clay;’

and bids them—

“ ‘Attend to the words
Of the sovereign birds,
Immortal, illustrious
Lords of the air,
Who survey from on high,
With a merciful eye,
Our struggles of misery,
Labor and care.’ ”

“Is that from Aristophanes? I have read his life, but none of his poetry. Men read such books at their college, do they not?”

“You may read with delight his ‘Birds.’ It is the ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream’ of Greece.”

He was not really thinking of the Greek poet. He was only feeling how soon the pleasant meeting would be over. He could not say what he wanted to say, and if he had found the language he desired, he would still have been afraid to utter it. The girl at his side walked in an atmosphere he could not enter. And yet she delayed her steps, and he felt she willingly delayed. She listened to him with eyes full of light and sympathy; he felt that he interested her. But all his usual self-confidence had deserted him. The petty, pretty compliments he had offered to a score of lovely women seemed too cold and meaningless. He would have talked to her in words made on purpose, but he could not make them. For he felt that their conversation had been forced and misleading, a thin coat of ice over a river deep, resistless beneath it.

And they were now at the park gates, standing in the shadow of the thickets of laurestine and pyracanthus. She was thanking him—hoping to see him again—speaking such ordinary words as were natural, but in a strangely conscious, embarrassed manner. For at this last minute, Lancelot's eyes were saying what his coward tongue had shirked; and as she hesitated her commonplace adieu, his dilating iris held her to the spot. He was reading her very soul, and paying no attention whatever to her words.

Then there was the sound of rapid footsteps, the laurels were sharply struck, the birds flew out in a cloud, and Squire Atherton set the gate wide open. He looked at Lancelot and returned his bow very slightly. Francesca said:

"I met Mr. Leigh in the birch avenue; he has kindly walked to the gates with me, father."

"Very kind of Mr. Leigh, I am sure. Good-day, sir." Then he turned suddenly and faced the young man: "And thou may as well understand the 'good-day' is for every day as well as this one. I did not seek thy acquaintance, and it is not pleasant to me to have it. If thou had any sense or right feeling, thou would have understood so much."

"Squire, I beg your pardon. I have no ill feeling toward you."

"Thou would be a queer one if thou had. I never did thee or thine any wrong that I know of. But Leigh is wronging Atherton this day and every day, and when I tell thee to keep out of my sight, and away from my home and my daughter, I show thee quite as much Christianity as thou has any right to expect."

Lancelot looked at Francesca, and his eyes made an appeal that was irresistible.

"Father," she said, "Mr. Leigh is very sorry about the mill. He told me so. He would stop the building of it if he could."

"Then he is a very bad son—a particularly bad son—and I am right glad he is no kin of mine. If he had stood by his father and threeped me to my face that his father was right, and I was far wrong, I would have thought a deal better of him."

The squire was answered by Stephen Leigh himself. The old man had seen his son and Miss Atherton together, and had felt a sudden kind feeling toward the young people; and as Stephen had the most exalted idea of his own influence, and of his own way of managing the most difficult affairs, he had felt no delicacy in interfering. His heart was full of affection; he was

planning a munificent offer, and no doubts or wavering stayed his steps. The squire, Francesca, and his own son stood a little behind the laurels at the entrance. In the intense feeling dominating each heart Stephen's footsteps on the turf had not been noticed; and when he answered boldly the squire's assertion, he took every one by surprise.

"I can threep for mysen, squire; and if Lance thinks differently to his father, he is a man now and he has a right to his awn thoughts. Good-morning, Miss Atherton. I saw you and my Lance walking together, and a bonny couple you made. The eye not charmed with you has no light in it. Come, squire; if you will walk forward a bit I hev a friendly offer to make. Why should we bark and bite at each other?"

"Mr. Leigh, you have done your worst to Squire Atherton. Your mill is an offense to me, morning, noon, and night, and your offer of friendship is insult added to wrong."

"Well, squire, one may bid, but it takes two to make a bargain."

"Sir, I want to make no bargain with you."

"Mebbe, now, our children may hev more sense. I notice that my Lance is varry fond of being near Atherton Court. The apple is not far from the apple-tree, is it, squire?"

"Speak for your own child, Mr. Leigh. My daughter is beyond your consideration."

"No offense meant, squire. I am used to speaking plainly. There are no mouse-corners in my mind."

"Your mind is your own, sir. I do not interfere with it!"

Then he looked toward Francesca, and saw that Lancelot was talking to her in hurried, eager tones—pleading, apologizing, saying he hardly knew what.

“Francesca!”

The one word, uttered by the angry father, was instantly obeyed. Francesca bowed slightly to Lancelot, and went to her father’s side. He stood a moment looking at the two Leighs, then his fine breeding asserted itself. He lifted his hat, gave his daughter his arm, and with a forced deliberation turned into the park.

Francesca had obeyed him, but her heart was in rebellion; and as they walked homeward and the squire muttered to himself and kicked the pebbles at his feet with a meaning indignation, she gradually began to express her anger, in most unequivocal words.

“You treated me very badly, father. I do not like to be called, as if I was a dog, ‘Francesca!’”

And she imitated the dictatorial tone of the squire, with temper that made the one sweet word an intolerable offense.

“Thou should not call thyself in any such way. I never did so.”

“Yes, you did, father. And you behaved badly to the Leighs. Suppose they have built a mill near us! They bought the land to build it on. All Yorkshire does not belong to us. A great many county families have had to put up with mills near them. In the long run, they find the mill a great benefit. Mr. Leigh wants to be friendly.”

“Be quiet. Leigh friendly! I wonder if the world is coming to an end! I wonder if I am Squire Ather-

ton or not! I wonder if thou art really Francesca Atherton! Everything is upside down, I think!"

"Mr. Lancelot Leigh met me in the birch walk. I suppose he had as much right there as I had. He got off his horse, and walked with me to the park gates. And we talked of Wordsworth and the birds and such like."

"He had no right to get off his horse. And 'birds and Wordsworth and such like' are not for thee and him to talk about. The 'weather' was far enough for him to go—and too far. I know what 'Wordsworth and such like' means. I know men send poetry where good honest prose would not dare to venture. If ever a young man and a young woman get together, they begin talking poetry. It is their way of flying round a candle."

"I never knew you to talk vulgarly before, father."

"My lass, every one gets down to their vulgar tongue when their heart is hot with insult and wrong. I think thou behaved very badly, talking poetry and birds and such like with a spinner's son. Ask thy Aunt Loida."

"Aunt Loida will say I did nothing wrong."

"Thou wilt find out different."

And greatly to Francesca's amazement, Loida took the squire's part, decidedly.

"The lady of Atherton Manor," she said, "ought not to walk with young men in the lanes and by-ways. If Mr. Leigh wanted to see you," she continued, with mild indignation, "he should have called here. He had no right to get off his horse and impose his company on you."

"I liked his company. It was no imposition. I am

so weary of this life. The days come and go, and they are all the same. Oh, how I wish something strange would happen!"

"It is very foolish, Francesca, to wish to see beyond your horizon. And wishes are like bits of stained glass: you see nothing through them in its true colors."

"Aunt Loida, I have heard that you were once very fond of company and gay doings. How can you live here?"

"Ah, Francesca! When our joys die, they find no grave for us. We must live on, just as the rose-tree lives, though all its flowers be broken off. The spring brings roses again if the tree lives on; perhaps I am waiting for life's second spring. If you are tired of this quiet home, however, you may soon have a change. Jane Idle is going to be married, and we are going to Idleholme."

"How glad I am! Whom is Jane going to marry?"

"I do not know the gentleman. He is called Crewe. Jane has a brother, I believe?"

"I have heard talk about him. His name is Almund. He is very clever. She used to boast of him when we were at school. But all the girls boasted of their brothers. Shall I have some new dresses, Aunt Loida?"

"Some new dresses will be very necessary. Come and let us look through your wardrobe."

No better way could have been devised to soothe the irritation of the morning, and in the discussion of toilet fineries Lancelot was for the time forgotten.

But Lance was not able to forget. His ride home was rendered bitter, not only by a sense of personal defeat and humiliation, but by the anger of his father.

Stephen Leigh felt all the reasonable indignation of those whose gift is flung back in their face.

"I came up with a kind heart," he said, "and I think mysen as good a man as Rashleigh Atherton. I fancy he looks down on us a bit, but we can count Leighs with Athertons any day. And if it comes to brass, we can put down a hundred sovereigns to one that any Yorkshire squire hes! Ay—any of them!"

"I have set my heart on marrying Miss Atherton, father."

"Well, then, thou shall marry her, if thou hes set thy heart on her. Eh, Lance, iverything can be bought, but day and night."

"I am afraid your interference this morning was a mistake. You do not know anything about such men as Squire Atherton, and the society he lives in."

"Niver thee mind. I know all about investments and percentages; and though love may do a great deal, money does iverything. By all I could make out, that young lady seemed well suited with thee. I thought you were walking varry loving-like together, and I came up ready to settle iverything plain and square, for I hate any back-stair work."

"I fear, however, that I have lost her forever."

"Nay, I wouldn't fear anything. Hope is as cheap as despair."

"The squire is beyond calculation, and—"

"He is beyond pleasing, if that is what ta means. I don't blame him varry much. He sees that he'll soon be nobody where he hes been iverybody. What is the squire to the loom-lord who runs a thousand spindles and keeps a whole village thriving and busy?"

"The squire is an old friend to the village."

"My lad, it isn't the old friend, but the rich friend. Poor folk cannot afford to know poor folks. That is it."

"But even so, why should the loom-lord put down the squire? There is room for both."

"Nay, there is not. If two apples grow on one twig, and the twig is too small for both of them, the weakest is bound to fall to the ground. Atherton Village is too small for two masters, and the master that hes the 'wherewith' will hev the service. Now, then, let that proud girl go. Thy mother is fain for thee to marry Maria Crossley. Couldn't thou fancy her for a wife?"

"I will marry Miss Atherton, or die a bachelor for her sake."

"Well, I niver! Thou is a fool! And I don't know whether I ought to answer thee according to thy folly or not."

Lancelot laughed.

"You are in no greater strait than Solomon was, father. First, he says: 'Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou be, also, like unto him.' Then again he says: 'Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.'"

"Well, then, what dost thou make by that?"

"I suppose Solomon was balancing between the homeopathy and the allopathy of morals."

"Keep thy jokes to thyself, Lance, and see if thou can find sense enough to get a new sweetheart. Maria is a varry pretty lass."

"There is only one love in the world for me, father."

"Tip-top nonsense!"

And the old man looked at his son with that contemptuous pity age often bestows on a youth who throws away a fine appetite on a dinner of one course. They were at the stable-door, and as Stephen slowly got out of his stirrups, he added:

“It is not hard to forget, Lance. Keep away from Atherton for a week or two. Out of sight is out of mind, my lad.”

But while the father was giving orders about the weary horses, and talking of oats and buckles and saddles, Lance was walking through the leafless garden, singing softly to himself:

“ ‘That out of sight is out of mind,
Is true of most we leave behind;
It is not true, nor can be true,
My own, my only love, of you!’ ”

CHAPTER IV.

MARRYING AND PROMISE OF MARRIAGE.

The fountains mingle with the river,
And the rivers with the ocean ;
The winds of heaven mist forever
With a sweet emotion.
Nothing in the world is single,
All things by a law divine,
“ In one another’s being mingle,
Why not I with thine ? ”

HOWEVER careful we are in the arrangement of our plans, something, and often the most important thing, escapes consideration. Squire Atherton in encouraging the visit of his daughter to Idleholme never reflected on the possibility of its being in the neighborhood of Leigh Farm, nor yet that the two families might be acquainted with each other. Yet both of these circumstances existed, and they were made evident to Francesca a few days after her arrival at Idleholme.

As her stay was likely to extend over some weeks, she was accompanied by her own riding-horses and groom ; and one morning, when every one appeared to be exclusively occupied with affairs relating to the approaching marriage, she determined on a gallop across the wold, attended only by her servant. She was accustomed to a life so quiet and so full of orderly refinement that the hurry and laughter, the endless demands, the running about, the sense of feasting, and of prepara-

tion for more feasting, had become excessively tiresome to her. She was nervous and fretful, and longing for the peace of Nature, even though Nature appeared to be hostile.

For the weather was gray and wintry, and the black, low-hanging clouds portended a coming storm. Jane protested and Miss Loida advised, but Francesca was not to be moved from her desire.

"If I do not ride this morning I cannot dance to-night," she said. "I am tired of human beings. Let me take my own way now, and I will take every one's way afterward."

She had been, indeed, singularly affected by daily contact for a week with Jane's brother, a young man of distinctly modern type. Almund Idle had been everywhere and had seen everything. He could play billiards, and quote Horace, and make money on the stock exchange. Small, alert, and rather handsome, he was also polished and exceedingly proper; there were no angles about him, and he had no illusions.

"I am not at ease in his company," Francesca said to her aunt. "If there is any thought in my heart, I need not put it into words; he is sure to know all about it."

"Your father thinks very well of Almund Idle. He will be a great man, Francesca, and I think he is fond of ladies' society."

"He is very fond of his sister Jane, and she is as clever as her brother."

"He was saying yesterday that Shakespeare had a miraculous intelligence in making Hamlet sisterless. He thought Hamlet failed in being a hero because he

had no sister to help him. His mother was not good, and Ophelia—withdrew, and there was no sister Jane near. That was the way he put it.”

Francesca was buttoning her habit, and she tossed her beautiful head a little scornfully as she answered Miss Loida :

“It was Hamlet’s own fault that Ophelia *withdrew*. I heard Jane teasing her brother yesterday about some young lady she called Lydia. I hope he is engaged. I should feel so much more at ease with him if I knew he was human enough to be in love.”

Then she kissed her aunt and went out into the grim winter day ; for no scenery in England is sadder and wilder than that of the West Riding in winter weather. The bleak range of low hills before her was partitioned into fields by leagues and leagues of stone walls, and here and there she came upon a dreary village or a desolate mansion standing forlorn on the bare wold.

The uncouth manner, and the strong, rude dialect of the quarrymen she met was disconcerting. They stared at her with sullen ill-will, or looked down upon the earth as they passed her. The very sheep lifted their heads as if annoyed at her intrusion, and watched her suspiciously as she rode away into the gray dull dampness enveloping the landscape.

It was a relief to come suddenly upon a little church set in a grove of yew trees. There were a number of carriages around it, and some rosy-cheeked children : “It wer’ a wedding doo-ment.” They were waiting for bride coins, and in the interval spelling, across the churchyard gate, a name and date across a marble slab standing white and lonely near by.

She read it to them :

“ ‘ You shall pray for the souls of Bernard and Margaret Dysart, who died A.D. 1600. ’ ”

Then she went thoughtfully onward. There was a nearness to heaven in the words ; a sure belief that God's mercy for departed souls was still to be reached by human intercession, that gave to her a singular serenity. The world seemed instantly another place. She began to pray for the souls of Bernard and Margaret Dysart ; and the act made her realize something of that personal communication with God which Adam lost and which Protestants reject.

The few solemn words lifted her above the dreeping atmosphere, and then—so startling are the antitheses of life—out rang the wedding-chimes—

“ Low at times and loud at times,
Rang the beautiful old chimes.”

And, as she listened, the wind changed, and snow began to fall. She was at least six miles from Idleholme, and she looked around for some house in which she could take shelter.

“ If we could find a cottage, Peel,” she said to her groom, “ I would remain there until you went back and sent the carriage for me. I do not like to ride through a snow-storm.”

She was really thinking how uncomfortable it would be for every one if she took cold and was ill during the wedding festivities.

“ I should think there was a house behind yonder plantation of firs, Miss Atherton. It is not more than half a mile away.”

She looked a moment at the dark spot in the gray atmosphere, and galloped toward it. The groom's supposition was correct; it was the screen on one side for a large rambling mansion, whose frontage and gardens faced the other way. Francesca rode up to what appeared to be the main entrance, but she could obtain no recognition, and she directed her horse to a large door at the other end of the building.

Here she was met by a middle-aged woman, who not very willingly acceded to her request for shelter until a carriage could be sent for. It was evident the woman felt no pleasure in granting the hospitality requested; but hospitality is the native instinct of a Yorkshire woman, and the circumstances which kill it altogether must, indeed, be unusual and unavoidable. Indeed, after the first reluctance had been surmounted, Francesca's hostess softened in a very marked manner. She would not permit the groom to have the extra care of the emptied horse.

"Thou wilt hev enough to get thysen and thy awn horse over the moor," she said. "I'll hev the young lady's sent to manger. Ride hard, or thou mebbe won't ride at all."

Then she led Francesca into the house. It was a remarkable old place, and Francesca won her way into the woman's heart by her frank expression of interest and delight.

"Thou should see it in summer-time," she said, proudly. "Such a place for bees and birds and fruit and flowers isn't in Yorkshire! No, not in all Yorkshire. Come in, thou art freely welcome."

They went into a long, low parlor with deep, sunk

windows and a waist-high wainscot of black oak. There were heavy oak beams across the roof, and Dutch cupboards in the corners, full of Royal Derby china. There were some old pictures upon the walls, and a sword over the door that had been used on Edgehill and at Marston Moor. The furniture was massive and homely, but it had an air no money could buy.

"The Leighs hev lived here, young lady, for generations on generations," said Francesca's entertainer. "We niver did count oursens county people, but we are mebbe a bit better than some that do. I hev a husband that is all for new ways of living; his awn father and mother wouldn't know his thoughts, and I hev a son who couldn't abide to live in the old house as it was. His father and him hed a new part built, and they hev satin and gold chairs—gilt I mean, honey, for all the gold is gilt these days. And they hev books and pictures and music-making instruments and ivery other kind of nonsense. But I live here. I live here in the old rooms where my people lived and died before me. They went to heaven out of them, and I am not sure they like heaven as well. For they come back here. Yes, they do!"

She made the statement with such solemn conviction that Francesca never thought of disputing it.

"I hev seen Grandfather Leigh twice this week. Husband says I am dreaming. But I told him it was not varry likely I would be ironing fine laces or counting up my dairy book and dreaming of Mark Leigh at the same time. Was it, now?"

"I am sure it was not."

"Well, I was doing up a bit of Brussels last Wednes-

day, and in he came. I saw him as fair as I see you. He went straight to that cupboard, and began to move the tea-cups, and I said, '*Grandfather!*' and he was gone."

"Why did he go? Why did he not tell you, or show you, what he wanted?"

"Nay, my lass! Dead men seem to be as contrary and senseless as living ones. Grandfather niver would tell his women anything while he lived, and he does not appear to be any more open in his mind now that he is dead. He came again on Saturday—just at the edge of the night. I was adding up the milk and butter, and he stood right there, by that table, and watched me. I said: 'Wait a minute, do, grandfather!' and I went to call my husband, but when we came back he was gone. Stephen—that is my husband—said 'it was a varry queer thing.' And I am sure it was. I thought Stephen would hev laughed at me, but he didn't; he just looked sharply in my face, and went out again. There was a 'feeling' in the room that made one's flesh creep and turn cold, and Stephen said, 'It's a varry queer thing,' and went away."

"Have you lived long here?"

"All my life—*mebbe longer.*"

She was sitting by a little table at Francesca's side, and she appeared suddenly to remember herself.

"Why-a, whatever am I thinking of?" she asked. "Thou wilt hev a cheese-cake and a glass of milk, I dare say. Or if ta likes a bit of Yorkshire pie, I hev one that cannot be beat."

She served Francesca with a Yorkshire plenteousness, and, as the girl smiled her thanks, she said, questioningly:

"You tell me that you have lived in this house all your life—*may be longer*. What do you mean?"

"Dost ta really think one lifetime, however long it be, can give us enough of this world? Nay, my lass. There is a deal more to see and to hear, to learn and to feel, than can be got through with in threescore and ten years."

Francesca looked curiously at the woman. She was slowly rubbing the polished blade of a knife with a fine napkin. Her interest appeared to be settled on the homely duty, but she was thinking of eternity. When she lifted her eyes, they were full of dreams and speculations.

"You must love this old house, then, Mrs. Leigh?"

"Love it! If it was a needs-be, I would glue its stones together with my heart's blood—ay, my lass, with the heart-blood of them that are dearer to me than my own life. What is this life?" she asked, with a contemptuous flip of the napkin in her hand. "Only a moment out of eternity. But my talk is all nonsense to thee, I dare say, and I wish my son Lance was at home. He knows how to talk—ay, to the best of people. But there is a wedding on hand not far off, and if you go to a wedding you hev to take a gift in your hand, or a cold welcome would be given, I'm sure."

"When I am married I will not accept gifts from my guests," said Francesca.

"I wouldn't if I was thee. It is a mean doo, and varry few gifts come with a good will."

Then a servant entered with some complaint, and Mrs. Leigh left Francesca alone. The girl ate her cheese-cake and drank her milk, and sat before the fire

musings, until she fell asleep. It was so strange to be in Lancelot's home and to be conversing with his mother. In all her simple life nothing so like an adventure had happened to her. She had discovered, also, that there must be an acquaintance between the Idles and the Leighs, or the latter would not have been asked to Jane Idle's wedding, nor would Lancelot have felt himself obligated in the matter of bride-gifts. And she thought of these things until she slept, and the thoughts in her mind turned to dreams.

When she awoke, Mrs. Leigh took her all through the house; for, in spite of her affected indifference to the modern additions, she had a certain half-scornful pride in the gilt and satin and the music-making instruments.

"This is my son's parlor," said the proud mother; and Francesca stepped with a shy pride just within the portal.

It was a very interesting room, well lighted, full of books and pictures and beautiful things. Standing boldly out between two windows there was a grand piano; it was open and strewn with loose music. Mrs. Leigh touched the notes in a nervous manner.

"It is a varry fine instrument," she said. "It cost a lot; and Lance does take a deal of joy out of it. I wish you could hear him play and sing. My word! He can charm the tears and smiles out of the hardest heart."

Mechanically Francesca walked toward the instrument, and her eyes fell upon a sheet of written music above the keys. It was a song, and the name was "Francesca!" She glanced down the page. Many words

were there, but she could only see that one word "Francesca!" and it sang itself like music in her heart.

Yet she was glad to escape, for she had almost the sense of having been dishonorable. She had surprised a secret, but it pained her, just as surprising a mother-bird off her nest had often pained her. It was a relief to hide away in the corner of her carriage, and shut her eyes, as if by doing so she could shut her discovery from herself.

It was a little adventure also to Mrs. Leigh, for she lived even more out of the world than Francesca did; and a beautiful young maiden eating a cheese-cake at her hearth was very like a fairy visit. She could hardly wait until Lance had removed his wrap to tell her news. While he was doing so he was talking rapidly.

"I have had quite a pleasant day, mother," he said. "I saw all kinds of pretty things, and I met Mary Taylor. Do you remember the little girl? She is grown into a beauty. It was worth going to Leeds to see her."

"If ta hed stayed at home, thou would hev seen a ten times bigger beauty. There was a young lady here this morning that could take the shine out of any beauty I hev ever seen."

"A young lady here!"

"To be sure. The snow sent her to shelter, and she staid with me while her groom went for a carriage. I gave her a bit to eat and talked to her. A more sensible lass I niver saw—nor more agreeable. I took her all through the house, and she said ivery room in it was as nice as could be—except thy room, Lance. She said nothing about thy room, and I do think she

thought as I do : that thy piano stands in a varry much-in-the-way place."

"What was she like, mother? Any one we know?"

"Nay, I know nobody like her. Her face was just sweet and bonny and loving. I took no notice of the color of her hair or the make of her clothes. She came on horseback, and she went away in a carriage—one of Squire Idle's, or I am much mistaken."

"Then it was some young lady who is staying there for the marriage."

Having given this opinion, he was silent. He was thinking of Francesca, but not dreaming that she had been in his home. Indeed, no suspicion of the fact ever came to him until Jane Idle's wedding-day; for there was a heavy fall of snow and much bad weather, and it so happened that Lance did not call at Idleholme previously.

And it was one of the charms of Francesca's sweet nature that her love was not of that selfish kind which breeds jealousy and suspicion of slight or unkindness. The purest affection "thinketh no evil;" and Francesca did not mentally pout because her lover had no supernatural intuition of her presence in his neighborhood. Every day she hoped a little; every night she thought:

"How sorry he will be when he finds out we have missed another day."

She heard him frequently spoken of. Jane even wondered at his absence.

"I suppose," she said to her brother, "you and Lance Leigh have had another altercation?"

"We had a little argument about Lydia Thornton—but then, I enjoy Lance's arguments."

Almund was not inclined to discuss Lance Leigh with his sister. He knew Jane admired him very much, and he was averse to making Lance a point of interest in any conversation when Francesca was present. For he admired Francesca, and the idea of her as his future wife was growing sweetly into his life. He had been informed that a marriage between himself and Miss Atherton would be agreeable both to Squire Atherton and to his own father; and he knew well that an alliance with Lydia Thornton would not be agreeable to his family. Balancing the two loves in his mind was neither a difficult nor a disagreeable mental exercise.

For his love, in any case, would be a conscious and well-considered act. The elaborate and long-continued education of an English gentleman had destroyed in him all spontaneity of feeling. He had no illusions, and he was accustomed to challenge his emotions just as he challenged his opinions. Both had to show good grounds for their existence.

He put a stop to Jane's discussion of Lancelot by taking Francesca to walk upon the covered terrace. He had no objections to talk about the young man, but he wished to avoid Jane's comments on the subject.

"I suppose you have not seen Mr. Leigh?" he said. "He has not called here since you came. Lance Leigh and I do not always agree; indeed, we very often disagree. Mr. Leigh is like his class—emotional. But you would enjoy his music. No one finds any fault with him at the piano. If he was not rich, he could make his living with his love-songs. His voice is what they call 'so sympathetic.' I have heard that he writes

poetry. I dare say he does. Fellows with his type of face very often do."

" 'His type of face' is then unusual? "

"It is regularly handsome. Byron, Keats, and Shelley, and men of that kind, have those regular faces."

"There are so many ugly and so many sharp faces now. I should think some regular faces would be pleasant. Have you noticed the men in a big city, how very much alike they look—as if they were all going to market? Sharp noses, sharp chins, calculating eyes, and an expression of 'cheat or be cheated.' Whenever I go to Leeds or Bradford that is the way the men's faces strike me."

"What is to be done? We must have money. Every door in life is barred with gold."

"Oh no, it is not! Ability opens the door to power, and learning opens it to honor. Friendship opens it to kindness."

"And love opens to—gold."

"No! I am sure not. Love opens to love."

He looked at her glowing face and shining eyes, and felt the door of his own heart stirring. For a moment or two he had an envious greed of those who could take Love to their arms, and count him lord of all. But he was far too polished to give such an elemental emotion tolerance. It belonged to an elder world, to half-civilized societies, to natures which could be pleased like children, with sophisms and phantasms and fallacies of the feelings. For Almund Idle saw no mystical veil shadowing some unseen wonderful shekinah. He stood at that point where men do not try to lift the veil, because they are sure there is nothing behind it.

Yet he listened to Francesca's enthusiasms with a kind of delight. A wife with such candors, such capabilities for loving, such sweet, flattering ideas of masculine superiority, might be a far more charming and satisfactory life-companion than a girl like Lydia Thornton—a girl who saw through all the shams of life as clearly as he himself did.

After this he paid a great deal of attention to Francesca. He praised her beauty and admired her dresses, with all the curious frankness of the modern lover; and felt her old-fashioned vivid blushes raise a very old-fashioned vivid delight in what he was pleased to call "his heart."

He had fits of reservations and fits of absolute surrender many times a day, until the wedding morning. Then he resolved to let his liking for Francesca grow to any comfortable condition of love that it was capable of. His last reservation was withdrawn. It was necessary to his perfect satisfaction that the public should indorse his choice, and Francesca was acknowledged to be the fairest of all the fair women present. The bride was indeed the center of interest, of kind speculation, and of good wishes; but Francesca was the center of admiration. Her pale-violet velvet dress, her white velvet bonnet, and abundance of white furs gave to her aristocratic beauty a queenly mean and semblance.

It was at first sight wonderful how any mere mortal man could find courage to offer escort to a creature so evidently more divine than himself. But Francesca's native gentleness and her cultivated consideration were like the outstretching of the golden scepter. All men could feel in her presence that she sweetly deprecated

her own charms and exalted their masculine excellencies. And as Almund was really of less stature than Francesca, this secret, subtle, quite unconscious flattery to mere manhood was very reassuring and complimentary.

On the morning of the wedding, when the church was crowded with guests, Lancelot again saw his love. She was leaning upon the arm of Almund, and stepping altarward to the sound of a noble marriage hymn. He saw her before he saw the bride; afterward he saw nothing but her. A fresh adoration filled his soul. He longed to kiss the chancel flags over which her feet had passed. He noticed just where she stood, and promised himself to come back and fill the same space of air and light. Something of her personality might remain there, though but the scent of her garments, the inaudible echo of her voice, the invisible emanations of light from her luminous countenance.

As the wedding-party passed out of the church, he contrived to meet her in the porch. She had been expecting the meeting, and she gave him, in passing, the glorious smile she had been keeping for him alone and the clasp of her ungloved hand. And then his happiness was higher than the clouds, and his chagrin deeper than the ocean; for *she* had foreseen their meeting, and shown him such gracious and considered favor; and he, alas!—he had not been prepared for it.

He called himself stupid and blind and unworthy, in a score of different ways. He felt as if nothing he could do in the future would atone for that momentary want of intuition. And at the wedding breakfast he was placed far from her; too far to catch her eye or hear her

voice, though not too far to see Almund's devotion to her service. He was very angry with Almund Idle—his little nod of recognition in Francesca's presence seemed an intentional offense. It was too patronizing, and Lancelot, while drinking the bride's toast, was wondering what he should do to the man, what he should do to restore his own self-esteem, and what he should do to wound Almund's satisfied complacencies.

For lovers are either in a heaven of confidence or in a hell of despair. And Lancelot, with a mortal's perversity, thought little of Francesca's ravishing smile and freely given hand; his own dullness—the mortification of it; Almund's offensive salutation; his air of familiarity; his attentions to Francesca and her apparent reception of them—all these things made the wedding-feast a miserable affair to him. And then when the breakfast was over, Francesca left the room with the bride, and there was no hope that he would meet her more closely at that time. But there was to be a ball in the evening, and perhaps he might then be more fortunate. Still, he must wait until nine o'clock at night, and it was only noon. How was he to get the nine hours over?

Now, the day that begins badly often ends well, and the ball fully atoned for the breakfast. And oh, how lovely, how lovesome, how loving she was! Such happy dances; such happy confidences about nothing at all; such eloquent rests among the palms in the greenhouse! And then, in a kinder moment, the little secret she had hitherto kept:

"I was caught in a snow-storm, and I sheltered in your house."

"Was it really *you*?"

"It was really *me*. And I saw your mother. I think she liked me."

"I am sure she did. She said you were a beauty. And mother does not take to every one."

"I should like to see her again."

"Will you ride over to Leigh Farm with me to-morrow? I will so gladly call for you."

"It would be delightful to do so. I will ask Aunt Loida."

And so the conversation went on—words that meant little in themselves, and that meant so much as the vehicle for a language not otherwise translatable.

After this every hour was joy-filled. Aunt Loida was not able to resist the youth's charm and Francesca's entreaties, for love's young dream had never grown old or cold in her tender heart. To cross a true love seemed to her a sort of crime against the soul. Lancelot and Francesca made her their confidante and the sharer of their happiness. And Loida made little messages for them—occasions for their meeting—solitudes which her presence did not break—secrecies she innocently shared.

It was Aunt Loida who was to bring the squire to reason, and it was Aunt Loida who tried to inspire in Lancelot's mother a sympathy equal to her own. But Mrs. Leigh was really a stronger opponent of the lovers than Squire Atherton was ever likely to be. The girl she had liked at first she soon began to dislike. She perceived that Lancelot's heart was set upon her, and she understood at once how such a marriage would affect interests dearer than life to her. If Lancelot

married Francesca, he would, of course, go to live at Atherton Court. Leigh Farm would be let to strangers. She could get no further than this supposition. The terror of such a contingency stopped thought ; she could only feel.

Still, for a month Francesca was very happy ; for if Mrs. Leigh withdrew more and more from her, Stephen Leigh was unusually proud and satisfied in his son's success. And yet he had a heart which could fully appreciate the view Squire Atherton would take of such an alliance.

"It is varry like treason in his only child, and I'd call it so if it was against mysen," he said.

"But, father," replied Lancelot, "we love each other so much. Love such as ours breaks all other ties."

"Then it is a varry poor kind of love, and I wouldn't hev anything to do with it. If wife-love and husband-love doesn't hallow and strengthen father-love and mother-love, it is a miserable, please-mysen, un-blessed bit of business. If ta hed a daughter of thine own, would ta think it a fair thing for her to forget all thy love and all thy care and goodness, as if they hed niver been ? To set thee in Cold-Shoulder Lane for some lad that was a stranger a month or two ago ? If Miss Atherton is willing to do that for thee, I am not willing to hev her for a daughter. I'd set little by her, and I'd tell her so quick enough."

"One would think you were Squire Atherton's friend."

"I hope I'm not his enemy. I was fair and square with him in business, and I'm none to blame if he cannot see his awn interest. Be thou as honest with

him about thy love as I was about my mill. He is a varry good, gentlemanly sort of man, and happen God doesn't make ivery good man to be a cotton-spinner. Now I'll tell thee what: Go to Atherton with thy Francesca—I wish she hed a more world-like name—tell the squire to his face what thou hes said to his daughter, and what she hes said to thee. That is only fair. Hes ta asked her to be thy wife?"

"She says she will marry no one but me."

"They all say that, my lad, or words varry like them."

"Miss Vyner has promised to speak to the squire and try and persuade him to—"

"Nay, then, if ta isn't man enough to tell thy awn tale, thou art right to send a woman with it. That wouldn't be my way, I can tell thee. I would go straight to Francesca's father and say thus and so, and 'What do you want us to do?'"

"He may say he wants us to part."

"Then I'd say: 'Varry well, squire; for how long? Will a year do?' If he makes it two years, he will do a varry wise thing. You are both young enough to wait and grow wiser. But niver thou send a woman on any business thou should do thysen. I'd be ashamed if I was thee! Face thy awn music. A woman indeed! A woman! They are foolish counselors and worse envoys, and in love as unlucky as can be. If ta can't speak for thysen, my lad, then hold thy tongue forever."

CHAPTER V.

A HAPPY HOUR.

See the mountains kiss high heaven,
And the waves clasp one another;
No sister flower would be forgiven
If it disdained its brother:
And the sunlight clasps the earth,
And the moonbeams kiss the sea;
What are all these kissings worth
If thou kiss not me?—*Shelley.*

Oh, for the old true-love time,
When the world was in its prime!—*Croly.*

LANCELOT was not averse to take his father's advice. It agreed with the natural openness and bravery of his spirit; indeed, his acceptance of Miss Vyner's offer of mediation had sprung from the anxious self-depreciation of the lover and not from the timidity of the man.

Francesca and her aunt returned to Atherton Court toward the end of January. The holiday feeling was then over, and life had settled into its usual placid routine. The squire went hunting when the weather was favorable; when it was not, he examined his accounts, wrote letters, made fishing flies, read the *John Bull* newspaper and the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

He was very glad to have his sister and his daughter home again. Life had been dull and lonely without them, and the first days of their return were given over

to gossiping with him on all the events which had happened at Idleholme. Very little things had a great interest to the quiet gentleman. He liked to look at Francesca's new dresses, and to read what had been said about her beauty in the local papers; and he enjoyed her descriptions of the people she had met and the lovers who had tried to win her favor.

"But thou says nothing at all of young Squire Idle. Did thou not like him, Francesca?"

"Mr. Almund Idle will not care very much whether I like him or not, father. He will go a-wooing accompanied by the family lawyer and the settlements."

"Oh! he is that kind, is he?"

"There is nothing new and nothing true, and it does not much signify; that is his general attitude," continued Francesca. "He told me that before he was twenty-five years old he had found out that faith in women was beyond his power, and that nothing could make him love his neighbors."

"My word! Some good man ought to give such a conceited jackanapes a horse-whipping. I hope thou let him see thou had no faith in him, and that nothing could make thee think about loving him. How ever do his neighbors bear with him?"

"They admire him very much. He is considered exceedingly clever, and I heard that one of the nicest girls in Yorkshire was in love with him."

"Well, well! It is a wonder! But women, God bless them, do love men that not even God Almighty can put up with. Thou has spoken of riding a great deal. I wouldn't think that a man like that would ever care for a horse."

"He does not. He says he shivers on horseback, and that it is folly exerting one's self to keep such an unruly animal in order—doing the work a coachman is paid to do. He likes a cushioned carriage and plenty of fur wraps, and a man to do his driving."

"Dear me! What a trial he must be to his father. Well, if thou did not ride with him, whom did thou ride with?"

"Very often I went alone with Peel; and very often Mr. Lancelot Leigh rode with me. He lived neighbor to Idleholme, and the families are quite friendly."

The squire did not answer. In a moment or two he rose from his chair, went to the window, and looked steadily out. Loida and Francesca looked at each other. There was a quick chill and silence. No one felt able to continue the conversation, and the tick of the time-piece and the crackle of the fire were the only sounds.

The garden into which the squire looked was like a girl draped for her first communion, all in white, and he had a sudden memory of the place when it was a glory of perfume and color, and Francesca stood there, scattering wheat to the pigeons. His heart was really wounded by this perversity of fate. He felt as if he had been deceived by a power which should have respected his blindness and weakness. At the mention of Lancelot's name tears sprang to his eyes—he had gone to the window to hide them. Standing there, the forlorn feeling of a man led astray by destiny assailed him. What could his love or prudence do against a fatality so pitiless?

Moments are hours in such mental conflicts; he seemed to lose his foothold, and to go down and down

into an abyss of unexpected sorrow. Something to lean upon was a necessity—the floor was reeling, the window receding, everything becoming dim and blank. He grasped the back of a chair, and by a peremptory exercise of will compelled himself to meet this consciousness of unavoidable suffering and disappointment. And then—so wonderful are the voices of comfort—a little brown bird on a bare spray said cheerily:

“Chuck, chuck! Have you anything for me this morning? I am so hungry.”

And he whispered:

“God bless the bird!” and went to the sideboard and got some bread-crumbs for it.

He was scattering them on the window-sill when foot-steps on the crisp snow made him turn his head. It was Lancelot Leigh. His youth and beauty were very remarkable in the clear winter day and against the sparkling white background. They would have been offensively so, had they not been made tolerable by the air of modesty which deprecated such offense. He bowed, in passing, to the squire, and stood upon his threshold.

Now the hospitable instincts of Squire Atherton were in the depths of his nature, and they had the strength which comes from centuries of indulgence. Though the visitor was his enemy, his first thought was to open his door and say:

“It is cold, come to my hearth and warm yourself!”

The words were unconsciously tempered by an air of proud, courteous resignation, as if he had added: “You can take advantage of my kindness and wrong me, if you choose, but the shame will be yours, not mine.”

Lancelot entered the room with an eager look at

Francesca, but both she and Miss Loida were unavoidably cold and constrained. They felt as if the visit was inopportune, and Loida's instant mental query had been: "Why was he in such a hurry?" On the contrary, Lancelot thought he had been uncommonly patient. He was anxious to explain himself, and, with the self-confidence of youth, he went at once to the purport of his visit.

"I wish to speak to you privately, squire," he said, "on a very personal matter."

"Sir?" answered the squire. "You can have nothing private or personal with me. What you have got to say, say now and here. Sit still, Francesca! Sit still, Loida! The gentleman can have nothing to say to me you may not both listen to."

Lancelot looked at Francesca, and hesitated. Her face—red as a rose—was bent over her lace-work, but she felt his glance and answered it with one encouraging and affirmative. Then he spoke out frankly, with a kind of bold respect:

"Squire Atherton, I have come to ask your permission to love your daughter."

"I cannot prevent your loving my daughter, sir. But I will not give a welcome to my shame and sorrow."

"I am sure there is at least no 'shame' in my love. I give Miss Atherton the honest affection of an honest heart. My name is unstained. My family, though not noble, has its own record of bravery and integrity."

"There has never been a trader, sir, among the Athertons. We are landed gentlemen, all of us. Miss Atherton will be Lady of the Manor of Atherton. I think it is an impertinence for a cotton-spinner to lift his desire

to her position. For I hear you are to have charge of the mill your father is building near me—an offense in itself, sir; a great offense.”

“I am very sorry the mill offends you, squire. I am not to blame in that matter.”

“I wouldn’t sneak out of a thing that way. Thou art not above taking the good of it. Why cannot thou say, as thy father says: ‘The mill is all right, squire; it will be a great blessing, and some day thou wilt say so.’ If thou talked in that sort, I could, at least, believe thou had the courage to stand by thy opinions, and I would like thee better for it.”

“Squire, I desire so much to please you.”

“Please thy own father, first of all.”

“I have been a good son, sir, always. My father would declare so, under all circumstances.”

“Well, then, I heard him tell thee never to marry a proud, not-to-be-touched lady of the land. Obey him.”

“He was in a passion when he said those words, squire. He knows that I have come here to ask you for Miss Atherton’s hand. He was glad of it.”

“Mr. Leigh, why should we bandy words? You want what I cannot find in my heart to give you. You want what you have no reason or right to ask.”

“Brother, I think Francesca has given Mr. Leigh both right and reason to ask her hand of you;” and Miss Loida looked steadily at the angry squire. “We are old, brother, and they are young, and—”

“We are nothing of the kind, Loida. I am in the prime of life. Thou art far more beautiful than thou was ten years ago. Dost thou mean to say that because Mr. Leigh is twenty-five and I am near forty-five, I

should ruin my hopes to gratify his? That would be a queer thing. Francesca, what has thou to say?"

"I am your daughter. I would not give you a moment's disappointment. What do you wish me to do, father?"

"I wish thee to tell Mr. Leigh that he must forget thy existence. Tell him that thy father's wish is more to thee than his wish; that thy father's love is more to thee than his love. *O Francesca! Francesca!*"

The words were the cry of a wounded heart, and he stretched out his arms as he uttered them. In a moment Francesca was within their embrace. Her head was on his breast. She was close to his heart. She was softly crying:

"O father! father! My dear father!"

"Say thou loves me best, my dearie?"

"I love you! I love you better than my life, father!"

"Better than this young man, who wants to take thee away from me?"

Lancelot looked at his love with his soul in his eyes. Her father claimed her by a feeling far older and far stronger. She remained motionless, suffering an agony of indeterminate emotions.

Miss Loida, trembling and weeping, interfered.

"Brother," she cried, "you are too cruel! You have no right to put such a question. Let Francesca sit down. My dear," she said, as the poor girl seated herself again, "my dear, weep; it will do you good." Then, turning to the squire, she continued: "Brother, I must speak for Francesca's mother. She would not like to have her little girl tortured between lover and father in this way. Look there, Rashleigh!"

Forgetful of every one, caring for nothing, Lancelot was kneeling by Francesca's side. His arms were round her, his cheek was against her cheek. They were weeping together. She was telling Lancelot to "go away," murmuring amid her sobs:

"I cannot grieve him. I cannot grieve him! He is my dear father. I love him! I love him! We must wait. There is nothing else."

The squire stood irresolute, silent. Waves of passion passed over him. He was like a great oak-tree in a tempest. Sighs, ejaculations, moans he was not conscious of escaped his lips. Loida stood silently beside him. The lovers believed they were taking of each other a long, long farewell.

This interlude of intense feeling, though lasting but a few minutes, broke the strength and will of every heart present. The squire was conquered by his own suffering. He said feebly:

"What shall I do? Tell me, Loida."

"Give Love a little favor. Whatever comes, you will be glad of it."

"Francesca!"

"Father?"

She stood up as he called her. Her hand was clasped in Lancelot's hand; tears were on the cheeks of both; their eyes were shining through the mournful mist of parting sorrow. The squire was struck by their beauty, their youth, their sad air of surrender. His voice was much lower. He spoke wearily, for he was exhausted with feeling:

"Francesca. Come to me."

She dropped her lover's hand, she went straight to his

breast, she put her arms around his neck, she burst into passionate weeping.

He held her close, for he was going to give her up, and—as Englishmen are apt to do—he spoke gruffly, because he was going to be kind.

“Mr. Leigh, I wish to make my daughter happy, but when one is not sure about a thing, it is a right way to take time to make sure. Take two years. Come and go as you desire—only, have a bit of discretion, and do not wear welcome and father-love threadbare. When two years are past, speak to me again. It may be, when we know more of each other, we may think better of each other. Now Loida, I’ll go to my own room an hour. Send me a slice of cold roast beef and a glass of wine. I feel a bit faint. Good-morning, Mr. Leigh.”

The favor gained so hardly was not one that could be used without great care and self-restraint. Lance found it difficult to do right. If he kept entirely out of the squire’s way, the unhappy father made a scornful wonder of it; if he visited Atherton Court in the squire’s presence, he could not avoid giving offense. It was a position that would have killed love in any nature less sweet and tolerant and self-forgetting than Lancelot’s.

Neither had Lancelot in his own home much real sympathy. His mother only tolerated “Lady Francesca” because her son had not only positively refused to marry Maria Crossley, he had shown also some admiration for pretty Sanna Newby, who just at this time finished her education and returned home. And if there were any human beings altogether hateful to Mrs. Leigh, it was her nearest neighbors, the Newbys. The

land of Newby Farm joined the land of Leigh Farm, and portions of the two estates had frequently changed hands. In the bad times of Leigh, the Newbys had bought some of the Leighs' land; in the bad times of the Newbys, then the Leighs had gradually redeemed their meadows.

The haunting terror of Martha Leigh's life was the fear that her husband would mortgage Leigh to Newby; for the Newbys were at this time very prosperous, and just as greedy as they had ever been of their neighbor's acres. And Sanna Newby was undoubtedly pretty. So that between her desire that Lance should marry Maria Crossley and her fear that he might fancy Sanna Newby, Mrs. Leigh was kept in a perpetual worry. Stephen thought she ought to be happy enough to compromise on Miss Atherton.

"It is few people," he said, one day, in reply to a long complaint on this subject—"it is few people, Martha, who get what they want, and so they ought to be well suited if they miss what they do not want. Miss Atherton is not as welcome as Maria, but she is better than Sanna. I'd be content if I was thee."

But Miss Atherton might be Lance's wife and yet not mistress of Leigh House, and this likelihood was Martha Leigh's terror. She was of that order of women who love their children passionately while infirmity or weakness asks for their protecting care. Lance, however, no longer came to her for consolation or advice. He bore his own trials and ordered his own affairs. But her home! It could not save itself from the Newbys. There was no voice in its gray stones that asked Stephen Leigh to spare it from usurers and loan-men. There was no one

but *her* to plan for its salvation or defend its rights, and in so doing preserve the place of her ancestors in the atmosphere of their influences.

For she fervently believed that strangers in Leigh House would shut its doors against the wraiths of those who had built its rooms and who still visited them. She was planning and fighting, then, not only for the living, but the dead. There was a cloud of witnesses behind urging her to maintain their rights, and Lance's marriage affected her mainly in this direction. Maria would insure Leigh in the Leigh line, for she was one of those earthly, selfish women who find connubial love all the love they desire. She would marry Lance and forget her own father and mother and kindred; she would merge her own house, if need was, into the welfare of his house. She would obey Lance like an Indian squaw, and for the bones of love he threw her serve the house of Leigh with all her body and all her soul.

The difference between such an animal woman and the spiritual Francesca was very great, and the shrewd Yorkshire woman understood at once which would aid her purpose best. Therefore she received the news of Lance's engagement to Miss Atherton with unreasonable anger and disappointment, and Lance was kept in constant irritation by the fears and predictions of disaster that was to come through his unwise choice of a wife.

It was some consolation that he had his father's hearty sympathy.

"Marry the girl thou loves, whoever she is. At the end she is the best wife," he said. "If I hedn't loved

thy mother with all my heart, what a trial she would hev turned out to be! But I always manage to excuse her tempers, and bide her ways. Why? Because, Lance, I love her. I love her so, even yet, that it is easy to forgive and forget. But it takes a deal of love at the outset to bank enough for such ill days as hev come to me, my lad!"

So, many restless, unhappy weeks passed. Lance, however, had consolations that were sufficient. There were certain days when the squire was sure to be on the magistrate's bench, and others when he was at the hunt—and at such times it was love that made the little world at Atherton Court go round. Miss Loida was then charmingly neglectful. She knew that love was a poem for two only, and that a third, however sympathetic, could not even be chorus to it. On wet days she let them wander about the old rooms and corridors, where every picture kept a story and every chair held a dream. And as the spring came on, there was the clematis arbor and the terrace walks.

Together the lovers watched the budding of the trees and building of the nests. Together they saw the opening of the lilies and the tulips, and the bluebells' little censer swinging. Together they listened to the throstles' sweet vesper, and to the delicious dissyllable of the cuckoo-bird. And as the garden filled with roses and with all the glory and odor of the warm summer, they went so joyfully through it that Lancelot could not keep Sappho's glorious wedding-song out of his mind. Twenty times a day he found himself stepping to its glad march, and then blushing at his own happy imagination—

“ High lift the beams of the chamber,
Workmen on high ;
Like Ares in step comes the bridegroom,
Like him of the song of Terpander,
Like him in majesty ! ”

And oh ! the sweet, long evenings, when the cool air thrilled through the apple-branches, and joy and peace flowed down upon them through the rustling leaves ! When they sat silent together, and listened to the nightingale, in the deep woods, singing to his mate !

They were both so young, both so fair, both so much in love, it was impossible not to feel a certain joy in joy so innocent and so natural. Miss Loida made little plans for their indulgence ; there was not a servant in the house but what gave them a smile ; the gardener saw them coming and slipped out of sight. Something sacred invested a love so pure ; every one shrank from intruding on its privileges ; it was not made a joke of by the stable boys. Perhaps, even then, it had an *aura* of sorrow, which those outside felt and unconsciously respected.

Toward September the squire perceptibly softened toward Lancelot. For without any intent the young man did a thing that pleased him very much. There was a large tract of waste land on the boundaries of the Atherton estate, and Lancelot began to buy it. That was an investment Squire Atherton could understand. If that ugly mill toiled, not to make calicoes only, but that cloth might become land, he could better bear the sight of it. For three great principles moved his life to their dictates—to love God and the church of England, to fulfill all that pertained to his social position with

honor and integrity, and to do his duty by the land—his own land first and his whole native land after it.

He began to talk to Lancelot about the draining and improving of these waste acres, and Lancelot perceived the advantage he had gained. He left them to the direction of the squire, and the squire felt them upon his honor, and saw that they had justice. And from land to politics was an easy transition. The squire was pleased to find a man likely to be so near to him a stiff Conservative in principle. Then he began to see how he might use his influence in sending Lancelot to Parliament. The idea took permanence in his mind. He felt already a partisan's interest in his success. And Lancelot was pleased with the proposition; he was indeed anxious to do anything which would make him more worthy of the girl he so entirely loved.

The improvement of land and its representation was the squire's hobby; he liked to talk about it, for he talked well on his own side of the subject; and Lancelot differed just sufficiently to give him the pleasure of convincing his opponent. This was another favorable point; it is not hard to learn to love those whom we conceive ourselves to have corrected, especially when they are teachable and obedient. It may be suspected that love, and not the land-owner, made Lancelot easy of conviction; but if so, was not that state rather enviable than otherwise?

So day by day the atmosphere of Atherton lightened and brightened and grew pleasanter. For the words of love and of loving-kindness, the smiles and good wishes and snatches of old-world songs breathed into it, made it sweet and calm and full of happy influences,

just as words of anger and hate and sinful mirth trouble and darken and make its waves too turbulent for peace or restful life.

But there is a tide in love as in all other things; some happy hour, when loving hearts touch the rapture of perfect unison in elements that are wholly responsive and propitious. One evening in September this full tide of joy came to Lancelot and Francesca. The harvest moon filled heaven and earth with its mellow radiance. The reapers were among the wheat binding it into sheaves. They were singing, as they worked, some old sickle song. Soft and loud, stopping and beginning again, its burden came over the fields and through the garden and touched everything with a sweet melancholy:

“ We have reaped, and we have bound,
Let the year go round ;
Let—the—year—go—round,
Let—the——year——go——round.”

The squire had been in the fields all day and had come home at evening weary but happy. There was a noble harvest, his barns would all be full. Loida met him with smiles, and the meal he liked best was waiting for him. Francesca came in to give him a kiss and put the sugar in his tea. He felt really as if his lot had fallen to him in pleasant places.

When he had eaten, he said:

“ Let us go into the garden, Loida. I’ll be bound Francesca and Lancelot are there.”

He still hesitated to say “ Lancelot,” but at that moment he felt sorry for his hesitation, and added, with the intention of atoning for it:

"He is a fine fellow; eh, Loida?"

"He is as good as good can be."

"To be sure he is."

Then he went slowly out, his pipe in his hand, and Miss Loida walked at his side. She was dressed in a light muslin gown, mostly white, but having wavering points of light green in it. A black ribbon belt was round her slim waist, and black lace mitts on her hands—a stately, lovely lady, whom it was good to see and good to talk to.

The clematis arbor was empty, and they sat down in it. A nightingale was singing far off in the woods, and the reapers' voices came softly from the meadows. The air was still, warm, and radiant. It tasted of the ripe peaches and apricots, of the bergamot flowers and the hot, sweet lavender. There was a bed of white lilies not far away, and the star Venus hung like a great white lamp near the horizon.

Loida dropped her hands, and sat thinking. The squire lit his pipe, and sat thinking. They did not need to tell each other what they thought about. They understood and respected that confidential silence which is often the surest sign of trustful friendship. Suddenly the delicious air was thrilled with that melody which is beyond all other melodies—a charming human voice—a voice whose living notes, joyous and entrancing, compelled all influences to become a part of its witchery.

The squire was delighted. He put down his pipe and stood up to listen.

"That is Lance," he said softly; "but whatever is he singing? Wilt thou come here, Loida?"

She rose and stood beside him. She saw what he

had called her to see—Lancelot and Francesca walking slowly up the terrace steps. They were both bare-headed; they were both dressed in white, and the moonshine made a wondrous glory all over and around them. Lancelot's face was bent to Francesca's. He was telling his love in such words and tones as are only learned in moments of inspiration, and only repeated when men forget that they are mortal.

They came to the lily-bed, and they stood there. It was no wonder. The great white flowers in the heavenly light looked like the flowers of heaven. Their perfume made the heart faint with joy. Lancelot gathered one. For a momnet he held it to his lips as if he would catch its perfume to make more sweet his song. Then he gave it to Francesca, and she would have kissed it, but Lancelot caught the kiss between her lips and the flower; and so began to sing again. His bright face was lifted, and it mirrored the full glory of the moon. Francesca leaned toward him as a flower leans to the sun.

“ Have you seen but a bright lily grow
 Before rude hands have touched it?
 Have you marked but the fall of the snow
 Before the soil hath smutched it?
 Have you felt the wool of the beaver?
 Or swan's-down ever?
 Or have smelt o' the bud o' the brier?
 Or the nard in the fire?
 Or have tasted the bag of the bee?
 Oh, so white! Oh, so soft! Oh, so sweet is she! ”

The exquisite words were breathed in exquisite music, in notes full of passion, sweet, ringing, and delicate. It

was like a "*Gloria in Excelsis*" of Palestrina's. The squire stood breathless, listening, tears were in Loida's eyes; without analyzing their emotions, they felt how truly a noble singer is a reed breathed through by the Spirit of God.

They went very quietly back to the house. In each heart there was the same thought—that it would be a kind of sacrilege to disturb such a service of love. Only the squire said, with a tender, melancholy sigh: "I wish I was a young man again, Loida." When they reached the house he sat down by the open window. But the song was finished, and the garden was as quiet as a garden in a dream. In an hour the lovers followed. They were silent, they were almost melancholy with the sweet sadness of earthly love. They had been on Enchanted Ground in the Land of Blissful Silence. They knew that when they uttered a word the spell would be broken.

Loida met them with a little effusion of solicitude. She divined and wished to cover their self-consciousness.

Was the dew falling? Was Francesca sure she had not taken cold? Were they not hungry? Francesca had so little tea.

The squire asked if the reapers were still at work. Did they hear their voices when they left the garden? And then, suddenly: "What wert thou singing to-night, Lance? I never heard that song before; no, nor anything like it."

"I was singing a love-song by 'rare Ben Jonson.' I set the words to music. Francesca inspired it."

"Sing it once more, Lance."

"I would rather not, sir. I made the song for Francesca only. I will sing anything else you desire."

"Well, then, we will have some sea songs. There is nothing like them." And he rose and went toward the piano.

Lance was already striking some introductory chords, and the squire, who had the strange love which agriculturalists have for hearing of and singing of "the sea," was soon joining his fine baritone to Lancelot's tenor in "Hearts of Oak" and "Britannia Rules the Waves," "The Heaving of the Lead," and a dozen other nautical favorites, until they sailed with the gale "On the Bay of Biscay, O!"

This was always the squire's last song. He felt that nothing could come after its magnificent roll and its air of stormy salt water. When it was finished he sat down, as he always did, with a sigh of satisfaction, and an intense admiration for the British navy and all the jolly tars that made it. Music is a noble interpreter; the squire and Lance found each other's hearts among the sympathetic chords. They shook hands at parting as they had never done before. Francesca stood by her father's side, and they both kissed her.

"It has been a happy hour," said the squire, and Loida smiled her sweet assent, and Lancelot once more kissed his love "Good-night"; and none of them saw, in the blue heaven of their hopes, the little cloud above them—the little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand.

CHAPTER VI.

“IT HAS TO BE BORNE.”

As if a door in heaven should be
Opened and then closed suddenly ;
The vision came and went,
The light shone and was spent.—*Longfellow.*

THE cloud came from the west—from the far southwest. It was the shadow of war; and what had war to do with the love of Lancelot and Francesca? Though the rumor and the fear of it had been in the hearts of thoughtful men for months, hitherto Lancelot had not been much troubled. His father had borne the burden of anxiety for both mills. Cotton had always been forthcoming for the looms at Atherton; Lancelot had not imagined a time when he would want “material” and not receive it.

But the time was near at hand, for the cotton land was in rebellion and its ports blockaded. There had been a great deal of talk about such a terrible calamity, but Lance had never believed it possible. The want of cotton, the consequent want of work, the certain famine and distress, had seemed to him like the lightning in heaven, far off.

He went to consult with his father. He found him in great anxiety and distress, but he also found that he had risen to the noblest point of the situation.

"Are you going to close your mill, father?" Lance-
lot asked, even as the two men met and shook hands.

"Not I. I shall keep it running as long as I hev
a shilling to buy cotton with."

"Hargraves has shut his mill."

"Hargraves is a big fat bear. He can live on him-
self rarely, and niver feel that he is a selfish brute for
doing so. I am none of his kind."

"But your cotton will not last long, and then you
will have to shut your gates."

"I won't shut them as long as I can buy cotton
at any figure. I have begun to run half time—for a
half-loaf is better than no loaf at all—and I shall try
to keep up to that mark till peace comes, or till we
get Indian staple in sufficient quantities to bring down
prices."

"What shall I do at Atherton?"

"What does ta think thou ought to do? I gave thee
Atherton Mill when ta won Squire Atherton's daughter;
now, then, do whatever thou thinks is right. I don't
keep thy conscience, my lad! My awn is about all I
can manage."

"It is none of our quarrel, father."

"Ay, but it is our quarrel, Lance. It is ivery good
man's and ivery good woman's quarrel. I hev'n't heard
a word contrary from any of the poor souls that will
have to go hungry for it. I am going to sell my
horses and stop wastry of whatever kind; and thou had
better do the same. Thy mother sent off all the house
servants but one."

"Is that fair? Servants must live also."

"A servant can be a servant anywhere; they can g'e

to Bradford and get work. A cotton-spinner is fit for nothing else."

"Do you think the war will continue for any length of time?"

"Well, I should say it would. The North has been preaching to the South a long while, and the South has been calling the North ivery ill name it can think of—and from what I can understand they can think of a good many aggravating ones—and words hev come to blows at last; and I'm afraid they won't find out in a hurry which of them can hit the hardest."

"Well, then?"

"'Well, then?' What does ta ask me questions for? Thou knows thy duty. Thou knows Yorkshire men and women won't beg under any circumstances. If thou art wicked enough to let them starve, they will starve without a word. Thou hes made a bit of money, and thou hes a good bit more thy grandfather left thee. I don't think at this time thou can save thy money and save thy honor and thy manhood also. Thou ought to know which thou values at the highest figure. I cannot help thee, my lad. When thou took the mill as a gift from me, thou took it with all it might bring thee—loss or gain. No man could then foresee what has come to pass."

"And you cannot help me?"

"I cannot help mysen. I'll hev more to do with my awn mill than I can manage, for I shall keep it going half time if I sell the watch out of my pocket to do so. I'll not shut the hands out to starve till I cannot raise another shilling. Thou can do as seems right to thee."

"I was making money fast, father."

"To be sure. And thou can save all thou hes made if thou chooses to shut thy mill till the war is over. I hev no doubt when that takes place two million bales of cotton—mebbe more—will be poured into Manchester market. Then them as hev saved their money can buy, and can run things about as they fancy to run them. I shall not be among that crowd, I can tell thee. And if thou art my son, I shall not find thee among them."

Lancelot smiled pleasantly.

"You will find me wherever you are, father. I may perhaps run the Atherton Mill a year on half time if I use all the money I have. Will the war be over in a year?"

"Nobody knows that, Lance. We can but do ivery day's duty as it comes, and hope for the best. I hev twice as many hands as thou hes, and my money is badly tied up, but a lot will hev to happen before I shut my mill-gates."

It was a pathetic country through which Lancelot rode back to Atherton. Many of the great mills he passed had been closed that Saturday night, and the silent, empty places, the smokeless chimneys, and the idle inhabitants standing in groups talking of their calamity, filled him with sorrowful apprehensions. He had begun to take great pride in his mill—begun to look upon it as a friend. He had also felt much interest in his hands; he had considered their comfort and pleasure, and Atherton was almost a model mill village.

But to have people on half time, half fed, perhaps sick, was not a comfortable outlook. And it did cost

him a pang to pay out pound after pound of the money left him by his grandfather—to pay it out on a “per-adventure,” not even to feel sure that his generosity would at last avail. The squire gave him but a cold approval. Between a man saving money and buying land and a man spending his capital there is a fundamental difference. The man himself is different; and the act, though really a far grander one than those the trumpet was blowing from west to east, was done without even a decided self-approval. Virtue may be her own reward, but Lancelot desired not only the approval of his own conscience—he wished this self-satisfaction indorsed by the good opinion of the man whose respect he greatly valued.

But Squire Atherton was in the position of one who sees the evil thing prophesied come to pass. Never before in his village had there been suffering beyond his power to alleviate. In times of agricultural distress he and his tenants and laborers bore the curtailment together, and were drawn closer by their mutual misfortune. They were, too, his own people—sons of the soil—who had lived from it and on it, in their generations, as long as the Athertons had lived at Atherton Court. But these white-faced, half-famished “hands,” sitting on the steps of their emptied houses or standing in mournful, hopeless groups at the street-corners, were strangers from Manchester, Salford, Oldham, etc. They looked at him, he fancied, with sullen ill-will, and he resented this intrusion of commercial poverty and discontent into his hitherto satisfied community.

He declined to talk about affairs with Lancelot. He let him see that he felt injured and offended; that he

regretted his late toleration of the mill, and withdrew any approval he had given. And his sympathies—it he expressed any—were on the side of the Southern land-owners. He put slavery, as an idea, out of the question. He thought only of the proprietors of the land having it invaded, and their homes wasted that their laborers might be benefited. Perhaps he took this view because it negatived any special virtue in Lancelot spending his substance for this idea. He could not bring himself to give it any encouragement or enthusiasm.

On the contrary, Francesca and Miss Loida were on the side of the weak and suffering, and the squire did not prevent them showing it. He privately thought his barns and hay-ricks might be safer if he let the ladies of his house go with the popular current. And in his really kind heart he was glad to see Miss Loida giving out soup, and sparing the whole household of milk and watching every slice of bread, that as much as possible might go to the hungry little children. He was glad to see Loida and Francesca busy all day making garments for them; glad to know they were going from house to house, helping the weak and the suffering. Quietly he gave a great deal himself; for if sickness and hunger were visible things, he could not bear to pass them without imparting succor. But yet there was a deep resentment in his heart at the introduction of such contingencies into his special neighborhood.

Lancelot felt this want of sympathy very keenly. He knew that the squire's regulated and acknowledged charity might have been a great help in his hopeless struggle with war and famine. And he did suffer, also,

in the gradual wasting away of his own substance. Every pound spent put his marriage with Francesca further off; and he was quite sure the squire would tell him that if he preferred to give his all for an idea, he must be content with the satisfaction the gratified idea gave him. Francesca could not marry a poor man; and Lancelot could not expect—could not, indeed, wish—the squire to make him a rich man by his gift or favor.

So the months passed drearily enough away. He knew from his mother's letters that his father was fighting an equally hopeless battle:

“He is simply selling all he has to keep the mill going.”

“Cotton is rising, and father is desperate, but not to be moved.”

“I am terrified your father will mortgage—perhaps sell—Leigh Farm. I am only able to think of this one thing.”

Such like sentences in her letters indicated the condition of things at Garsby, and they only varied as the hopes of a speedy peace rose or fell again.

At the close of the second year all the manufacturing portions of England dependent upon cotton were in a desperate and deplorable condition; hunger, nakedness, and pestilence had taken possession of them. By this time, also, Lancelot had spent all he had; yet the peace so ardently hoped and prayed for seemed as far off as ever. Then the day came he had feared—the day when he would be compelled to close his mill. It was a dull, wet morning in the middle of summer; a time when rain and clouds seem most of all mournful and unnatural.

His last pound was gone, and he knew that a few

hours' work would clear out the last tuft of cotton. He walked through the mill with an aching heart. Some of the looms had already stopped. There was no more cotton to feed them. At others the "hands" were watching the loads upon the looms, minute by minute getting smaller and smaller. In a short time there was not a shred left. Then men and women stood looking at Lancelot. There was something fearful and unnatural in the idleness and stillness of that busy, noisy place. The very looms seemed conscious of calamity.

With tears in his eyes, Lancelot raised his hand, and gave the order to stop the machinery. Then he turned to his people and said, almost sharply :

"Men and women, I have done my best and my uttermost."

There was an indescribable movement of assent and pity, and after a moment's pause the over-looker said :

"Thou hes, master. We are none likely to forget it."

They left the mill very quietly, without a murmur facing the inevitable; and Lancelot, standing alone amid his silent looms, heard the slow, heavy steps of the nine hundred go out of his gates. In the midst of his own despondency he recognized their heroism, for, in their way, these half-starved men and women had shown a self-respect equal to their master's. The wages he had been able to give them was nearly two shillings a week less than the charity which the relief fund would have allowed them; but not one soul had preferred it. All had worked manfully and womanfully as long as any pittance of wage was possible, rather than take the charity of the nation until they were compelled to do so.

He felt a sentiment of respect—almost of hope—as he considered this pathetic perseverance in honorable independence, unrecognized and unrewarded. Surely what these men and women could do and bear he also could do and bear. What if the squire failed to appreciate his self-denial? What if he had the world to begin over again? Thousands of good men were in like case; nothing more than was common to humanity had happened to him.

And he had Francesca's unvarying sympathy. Perhaps she held privately some of her father's opinions, but she never allowed Lancelot to know that she did so. In her presence it was almost impossible for the squire to be less friendly to her lover than he had been. She drew them together by all those sweet, affectionate arts which good women know and never have to learn.

Loida was also true as steel, for Loida had very old-fashioned ideas about love. She believed a lover in trouble ought to be twice as dear; she scorned the idea of deserting him for any financial cause; she told Francesca plainly that her troth-plight was as sacred as a wedding-plight, and that so long as Lancelot was personally worthy of her love she would be base and cruel to take back her gift. Yes, indeed, with some misgivings, the dear lady thought, "It might be the duty and privilege of some women to love on, even if their love seemed to be unwisely given."

Francesca listened to such advices with cordial approval. They agreed with her own ideas; for though Lancelot handsome, rich, joyful, successful was very dear to her heart, Lancelot handsome, poor, unhappy, the victim of unavoidable and unmerited misfortune,

was a thousand times dearer. In the early days of their love Lancelot had been the lord and giver of happiness; but now she was the lady of all consolations; and even in love it was more noble and blessed to give than to receive. Never had Lancelot been to Francesca so endearing as when he came to her in trouble to be comforted.

It was at this time the squire began to learn how little real power a man has, even in his own house, if there be a majority of women holding opinions different to his own. He was not, indeed, prevented from expressing his views, but it required a great amount of courage to do so; for Francesca answered him silently in looks of amazement and indignant reproach, or else she obviously gathered up her sewing and left the room in such marked distress that he felt as if he had wounded a singing-bird or done some other despicable and inexcusable act of cowardice. Then Miss Vyner would say calmly: "Squire, I am astonished at you!" or, "Whatever has changed you so much, brother?" Or, if his offense was very bad, she appeared too much hurt to question him at all, and the miserable gentleman was made to feel, at the same moment, that he was brutally cruel and yet shamefully misunderstood.

Mournful enough was the farewell Lancelot took of his love before he left Atherton. It was impossible to say how long it might be ere he could return in circumstances which would warrant the renewal of his offer of marriage. He was almost penniless. He feared his father was in a similar condition. The only plan he had for retrieving his fortune implied an expatriation

from England. He thought it possible to buy cotton in Mexico. Thousands of bales were said to be passed through Texas, across the Rio Grande, to the Mexican territory. From some Mexican port, it might be possible to ship it to Liverpool. The squire thought it a highly feasible speculation. He knew that there were a great many spinners who had money lying idle; he supposed they would be glad to send out a young man full of enterprise and spirit, and as to blockade-running, every one was aware that fabulous fortunes were made very quickly by it.

Lancelot talked his plan over with Francesca, and such discussions brought them very close together. Love, and love only, is cloying sweet; but wonder and fear, the sense of distance and strangeness, the assurances and despondencies, the possible glory of a glad return, all these things were strong, pungent flavors, tincturing the sentiment with emotions that blended together the romance of love and the delightful confidences and reliances of a still closer and dearer tie!

"I will never forget you! Never cease one moment to love you! My own! My sweet Francesca!" said Lancelot, one night in July, as they stood together in the clematis arbor.

He had come to say "Good-bye." He knew not for how long. It might be for a year, or for many years. It might be forever. But in any case, he vowed, with all the passionate tenderness of first love, with tears, with fond embraces, with sweet, long, sorrowful kisses, never! never! never! to be faithless to Francesca.

Francesca echoed every vow. Her lovely face, pale

as the pale flowers around them, was transfigured with her love. The soul shone through the flesh, and made it luminous. Her eyes were starlike. She made a kind of glory where she stood. For those few last moments she threw aside the usual sweet reserve of her manner. She put her arms around her lover's neck. She put her lips to his lips. She kissed her promises on them. The tears that fell from her eyes were on his cheeks.

"Forever and ever I am yours, and yours only!" she said.

"Forever and forever I am yours, my love," he answered; and the strong, sweetly solemn words fell slowly, one by one, into her heart, each sealed with the sorrowful kiss of a long farewell.

He left her in the arbor, and she watched him going down the terrace-steps in the moonlight as she had watched him at their first meeting coming up them in the sunshine. He went slowly, step by step, out of her sight, and she stood like one entranced till he had gone beyond her vision—till the very echo of his last foot-falls was inaudible.

Miss Loida had permitted and guarded this lonely parting. When it was over she went to her niece and let her weep in her arms.

"Tears will wash away the bitterness of grief," she said. "But he will come back, Francesca. He will come back, my dear. I know he will."

"No, he will not come back, Aunt Loida. There is a weight of death on my heart. I shall never, never see him again."

"Do not bespeak such ill fortune for him and for

yourself. O Francesca! Good comes to the call of hope, and not to the cry of despair. Go to your room, my dear girl, and tell all your fear and sorrow to the good God. Like a Father, He pities His children; like a Father who has both the power and the will to make His children happy. He will take care of Lancelot."

"But you do not know what I suffer, Aunt Loida. I am broken-hearted."

"Good hearts, brave hearts, faithful hearts, do not break, Francesca. They go on loving and hoping. And I know! I know! I have suffered. I once thought I should die of suffering. But, Francesca, the rose-tree stripped of every rose does not wither away and die down to its very roots. It bears its loss, and when the spring comes again it buds and blossoms, and is fairer and sweeter than ever. Can you not be as strong and brave, and as true to yourself and to all who look to you for joy and comfort?"

But in reality Loida knew that for heart-grief there is no known consolation. *It has to be borne.* Comfort cannot be given. It must spring from the very root of sorrow. When she left her niece, Francesca was kneeling at her bedside, sobbing with all the pitiful surrender to the inexorable that youth feels. For the heart is long in learning that tears are useless. Perhaps at three-score we may accept with dry eyes the blow we cannot escape.

In some respects Lancelot was more to be pitied than was Francesca, for the sorrow poverty mingles is hardest of all to bear. It might be good for him to have to make a struggle for daily bread, but he did not realize the good. He was altogether averse to overcoming the

world, in the sense of breaking into its storehouses and getting at its gold and silver. They say in Yorkshire that any fool can make money if he throws his soul into it and loses his soul for it. Lancelot wanted to make money, but he did not want to lose his soul or his honor or his self-respect in order to make it. Whatever, then, his prospects were, with this weak spot in his heart, there was more to fear than to hope.

He felt also a strange despondency, one not to be referred to his parting with Francesca. His senses were dull, their edges rebated; he was sure some ill, not apprehended, was approaching. And the feeling was like a lazy frost to his mind; it locked up all the vigor to attempt enterprise, by barely crying, "It is impossible!"

He reached home sorrowful and despondent. His mother was standing at the door as he rode up to it.

"I saw thee coming," she said. "It is time thou came. Thy father is very ill. I heard the 'death-pad' last night. It walked from midnight till dawn above his head."

Lancelot looked intently at his mother, and his heart trembled. She was gray as ashes. Her eyes wandered. He said, "Mother, you are ill;" but she answered sharply:

'Not I! I tell thee thy father is ill. He has been asking for thee all day long. Go thy ways to him.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOUSE OF DEATH.

All houses wherein men have lived and died
Are haunted houses. Through the open doors
The harmless phantoms on their errands glide,
With feet that make no sound upon the floors.

—*Longfellow.*

Go to thy rest. A quiet bed
Meek Mother Earth with turf shall spread,
Where I no more thy sleep may break
With fevered dream.—*Sigourney.*

LANCELOT went at once to his father's chamber. The low oaken room was nearly dark, the air heavy with fever and the sickly odor of drugs. Stephen, flushed and restless, had heard his son's step, and was watching eagerly for his entrance.

"My dear lad," he said, "there is something wrong wi' me—something more than common. And the doctor doesn't do me a bit of good. I think, mebbe, I am going to die."

"O father! Life is such a weariness, I wish I could go with you."

"Nay, nay, Lance! Bide where thou art. Thou knows what Yorkshire is. And getting out of life before you hev earned your grave is, mebbe, like running away from school. Happen you'll hev to come back, and learn your lesson over again."

"But I am going away from Yorkshire, from England, from all I love."

"*Why-a!* Whativer is ta up to?"

Then Lancelot explained his plan, and Stephen thought very highly of it.

"If good luck isn't here it must be somewhere in the world, and it isn't a bad thing in thee to go and seek it. As for me, I am fighting to the last gasp. I mean to keep fast hold on Garsby Mill, if all else hes to go. Peace is bound to come soon, Lance, and then a year or two will put iverything right again. Thou must speak to thy mother. She is varry unreasonable. She would let the mill and all its twelve hundred looms and grand machinery tumble down and rust to bits rather than hev an old chair or an old china tea-cup bring a penny to save us."

"On the subject of Leigh Farm, I am afraid, father, she will not listen to reason."

"I am Leigh as much as she is; but if the Leighs behind me know no more than to set store by things that are no use to live by or live with, I would just as lief hev their disapproval as their good will—I would that! I'm none afraid of them, living or dead. Thou wilt not leave me till I am better, Lance?"

"Not for the world, father! Not until you feel sure it is safe to leave you."

"That is as it should be. I would stay by thee. Go now and get a bit of supper."

"Father, would you like to see the rector?"

"What for? Does ta think I cannot speak to my Maker without a priest to go between us? Nay, nay; I went straight to Him last night, and I said my say—

‘God be merciful to me a sinner!’ Is there aught else? I hev tried to do to my neighbor as I would hev him do to me, and it’s a good bit harder to love your neighbor than it is to love God Almighty. Does ta think I am feared to go to the God who made me? Not I. He’ll be no harder to me than I would be to thee; and, God love thee, Lance, I would lay my life down for thy life—I would indeed!”

Lance stooped and kissed the large, hot face, and Stephen continued, with a smile:

“I hev’n’t been a church-goer—I know that. My mother took me once to get christened, and thy mother took me once to get married; and I hope, when I go again, thou and a few that love me will go with me. But I shall not be tried for eternity on that question. If I am, I hev a text ready—one my mother made me learn when I was a little lad, and I hev’n’t done so bad in setting my life to it—‘And what doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him; and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul.’ He can’t ask me for more than to keep His awn laws, and I hev tried to do that much—I hev, I hev, indeed!”

“I do believe you, father.”

“And as for the day o’ death, it is a day to be fearless and strong, and to put away fears, if you iver had any. There is no ‘blessed,’ my lad, for the despairing; neither in this world nor in that beyond it.”

Lancelot was astonished and troubled to hear his father’s words. He had never before seen this side of his father’s character. He had not, indeed, suspected that such a side existed, for there are periods, especially

in middle age, when religious life seems to have lost all potency, and all controlling power over the individual. But this is no proof that religious life does not exist; it may merely be flowing through unseen and unsuspected channels—channels too deep for mortal ken or observation.

Certainly the conversation seemed to give Stephen pleasure. He evidently, at this uncertain hour, wished his son to know that he had never been without religious instincts and aspirations; and that he found the comforts of the God he had worshiped in secret to be sufficient for his extremity. Indeed, he was far more anxious and uneasy about the affairs of this life than about anything that was to come after it. He heard his wife's steps, and it recalled him at once to the actual.

"Go down to thy mother, Lance," he said. "She is a bit trying these days. Thou must be patient with her. We all hev a weak side: mine is my mill; hers is her house; and thine, I'll be bound, is that bonny lass of Atherton's. Kiss me again. Eh! Lance—Lance! I can't help thinking of the days when thou wert a baby, and I carried thee on my shoulder, and next my heart. I can feel thy little hands yet about my neck," and he lifted his large, trembling hands, and drew his son's face down, and looked steadily into it, and said solemnly: "God bless thee, my dear, dear Lance!"

"My dear, dear father!"

"Thou wilt come a bit after me, but I shall find thee out in the next world. I shall know thee by thy loving eyes and thy likeness to mysen, and by that sweet, sweet voice of thine. Leave me now. I'd like to be a bit by mysen."

Lancelot met his mother on the stairs; he took her hand and walked to the parlor with her. As they went, she said, in a melancholy way :

“There is a cup of tea ready for thee.”

The room was as spotless and orderly as if there was no sickness near the place. The birds twittered in the ivy outside, and the scent of the wall-flowers came in through the open window. The great change was in his mother's face. It had always been a grave face; it was now almost a hopeless one. Lance had never conceived of a human countenance so full of something that was superhuman—yet not pleasantly so.

“What do you think of your father?” she asked, with her eyes fixed upon the floor.

“I think he is very sick. What doctor has he?”

“Doctor Thorpe. He is as good as any.”

“I would send to Leeds for the best in the town. I will go myself to-night.”

“Nay, you won't. Your father is going to die. No one can help him.”

“How can you talk so calmly of such a calamity, mother?”

“It will mebbe be the varry best thing that could happen. The Bible says that no man lives or dies to or for himsen; he hes to live for those behind him and those that come after him.”

“What do you mean, mother?”

“If he would keep his fingers off Leigh House, them that live in its rooms unseen would keep their hands off him. Did he tell thee he was going to mortgage house and land to Joshua Newby?” Her face had become scarlet, her eyes blazed; she was the incarnation of

indignant wrong. "If he will worry them that are stronger than he is, he must sup the cup they mix for him. I hev told him—I hev warned him—warned him, and better warned him."

"Mother, you let your affection for your family and your house run away with your best part. My father's life is worth all the old houses in the world."

"For God's sake, don't thee talk in that way! What-iver will I do? Whativer will I do?"

"Do the best possible to save father's life. I am going for another doctor."

"Thorpe knows. Thorpe hes known him all his life."

"Still, I will have another doctor."

"As ta likes."

She was now sullen and silent, and appeared to fall into a condition of hopeless indifference. Lance could not eat; he drank a cup of tea, and then rode into Leeds for advice. The physician he brought spoke of fever and of the man's gigantic strength, and the struggle there might be between life and death. Indeed, the patient was already delirious, and difficult to manage. For many days and nights Lancelot never left his father. In the land of the shadow of death, he kept close by his side. Sometimes the sick man called him frantically in cries full of suffering, and sometimes in the fearsome whispers of agonized terror.

"I am here, father! Close by your side. I will not leave you!"

In such assurances over and over, with exhausting monotonous repetitions, Lancelot passed many days of anguish and nights of anxious fear. For he had a highly sensitive nature, responsive to all unseen in-

fluences, and he could not escape either the one or the other.

At midnight, when his mother wandered restlessly from room to room, muttering indistinguishable words, falling upon her knees in speechless anguish, and the dying man whispered awfully from far, far off, the weight of untold years was upon Lancelot—indistinct memories—no thought embodied, but weight and power—and an obscure sense of the soul looking backward and forward through endless vistas. Then the atmosphere of the ancient rooms was heavy with life that breathed not; with powers that touched him to the quick, in moods which he had no senses to explain; with flashes of illumination from the inner side of life; vague terrors of nameless things; vague conceptions of times before this life began, and he seemed to miss his foothold in it and to fall into dreams whose unutterable desolation cast a shadow over him, even in the summer sunshine.

Steadily the strong man marched to death. There was some wonder at the inefficiency of all remedies, and Doctor Thorpe questioned Lancelot sharply about the administration of them.

"Whether your father be conscious or unconscious, they must be given him regularly," he said. "They cannot be neglected."

"They are not neglected, sir. My mother watches the clock, and brings them at the very moment with her own hand."

"Your mother brings them?"

"Yes. This room is too dark to measure them with safety and absolute correctness. We were fearful they would be given in wrong quantities. Mother took them

to the parlor. No medicines could be more carefully attended to."

The doctor said no more; he sat down and waited. In a short time Martha Leigh entered, with a glass in her hand. He took it from her and put it to his lips.

"Martha, this is plain water. Have you forgotten the drops? They are most important; they are life or death!"

He gave her the cup back, and she left the room without a word.

"Look after the medicine yourself," he said to Lancelot. "Your mother is troubled and weary, you ought not to rely on her."

The words appeared to be kind and considerate words, but they were negatived by the tone in which they were uttered. A fear he durst not think of came into Lancelot's heart. He was stricken for a moment dumb and motionless. The doctor had left the room; he was standing at the top of the stairs, looking, with a sorrowful uncertainty, back into it, when Lancelot approached him. Then he began to descend the steps, but the miserable young man arrested him.

"Doctor," he said, "you have known me all my life. What do you want to say?"

"Nothing but what I have said. Your mother is not fit to trust with the medicines. Drop the tinctures with your own hand. Do not ask me any questions, Lance. I have nothing to say to you."

"My father?"

"Is very ill. He will probably die before sunrise. I was going to tell your mother. I will leave the office to you."

"Is there no hope, sir?"

"It is too late to hope now. How could you be so careless? Had I known! Had I suspected! Yet I did wonder. How was it you never told me?"

He asked the question suspiciously, with a certain fierceness of manner, and then, shaking his hand free from Lancelot's, went from the house.

For a moment Lancelot stood where he left him. His face was scarlet. He trembled with anguish. If a stranger had heard him accused of a crime, they would certainly have said: "The man is guilty."

Recovering himself, he went back to the sick-room, shielded the candle again, looked tenderly at the prostrate figure lying with face upturned to heaven, white as clay, without sight, thought, or feeling, only not dead, and then, with passionate haste, he went to the parlor. His mother sat in a chair by the hearth. Her hands were dropped. She was gray and cold, and unresponsive to her son's entrance. He had hitherto respected this attitude. He thought it to be his mother's way of bearing sorrow. But, oh! if it should be remorse, and not sorrow. He stood before her, and she looked up and then down.

"Mother, do you know that father is dying? He will not live another day. O mother! mother!"

"I told thee he would die. He hed to die. It is his awn fault."

"You want me to think that his forefathers killed him?"

"To be sure they did."

"Then I hate them all—every one of them, man, woman, or child, that hurt him! The dearest father, the

noblest soul that ever lived! O father! My father! Lance would have died for you, as you would for him!"

"Wilt thou be quiet? It is a shame of thee. Hating thy awn, and daring to say it, too. Don't thee speak to me. I won't listen to thee."

"I tell you father is dying. The doctor says he is afraid he has not—had his medicines. O God! O mother! mother!"

She had risen in her passion, but she sat down at his appeal and laughed in a low, miserable way, muttering to herself as she did so.

"What are you saying, mother?"

"I will tell thee, if ta wants to know. I am saying that old Joshua Newby may come now with his papers. Thy father's hand will never sign Leigh away to him. He hes been here ivery day for two weeks to get thy father's name. Thank God Almighty he will niver get it now. Better a clay hand than a false hand!"

"Give me my father's medicines."

"Ay, thou can take them now."

"Oh, you cruel wife!"

"Cruel! Little thou knows. Hes thou a fire in thy heart and thy brain burning thee up bit by bit while thou art quick and living? Hes thou seen what I hev seen, or heard what I hev heard? Hes thou sat with the dead, and been sent to do their bidding and their will for them? Go thy ways, and don't thee dare to speak to me again till ta knows what thou art talking about."

"Do you know that Doctor Thorpe suspects you of letting my father die?"

She did not answer him a word. Her eyes were fixed upon his father's empty chair. A sudden breeze blew

the white shade sharply against the window and brought into the room the scent of wall-flowers. The little blow startled and hurt Lancelot; he never more could endure the woody perfume. He lifted the medicine vials and went upstairs. There are moments when all men weep. They may do it in secret, but, none the less, they cover their faces, and their palms are wet with the bitter rain. And when Lancelot sat down again in the gloom of his father's death-bed, and saw the white, helpless figure, and thought of the "peradventure" that might have been, he broke utterly down. Low sobs shook him from head to feet; he buried his face in his hands and knelt down by the dear father who would know him no more in this world.

All night he kept his lonely watch, and all alone he helplessly witnessed the last struggle of the departing soul. He was unspeakably wretched, for he had realized the wrong done only when it was too late in any way to atone for it. The medicine vials accused him; he could not bear to touch them, he could not bear to see them. An awful stillness was in the house, a stillness pervaded by spiritual life. Lancelot felt it press upon him on every side, and he resented the intrusion. With his open Bible in his hands he stood by his father's head and recited over and over the verses of the twenty-third Psalm. His low, clear voice, solemn and tender, penetrated the heavy shadows of the room, and his mother, stealing without her shoes to the shut door, heard him say: "'I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.'"

Perhaps also the comfortable words went with the departing soul, for in those ineffable moments just before

the dawn, Lancelot, looking into his father's face, saw a flash of parting intelligence, swift, and vivid as lightning.

"Father! Farewell, father," he whispered close on the dying man's lips; and instantly, from some mysterious distance, in tones sweetly hollow, like muffled music, came the answer:

"Lance!—my dear lad!—Good-bye!"

Then Lancelot was holding a clay-cold hand. He kissed it, and laid it across the quiet heart. For a moment he stood regarding the empty soul-case, the massive chest, the length and strength of limb, the large head—all the noble similitude of a man prostrated in the summer of his life. "O harmless Death!" thought Lancelot, as he softly left the dead man's chamber—

"O harmless Death! whom still the valiant brave,
The wise expect, the sorrowful invite,
And all the good embrace, who know the grave
The short dark passage to eternal light."

The words were uncalled; they came as if sent, and said themselves with sweet insistence, as he descended the stairs.

The house was still as a grave, the dawn was only breaking; he had a thought that his mother might be asleep in some upper room; but yet he went on to the parlor. She was sitting there, she was quite awake, she looked up at Lancelot with *the* inquiry in her eyes.

"Yes, he is dead! He is dead! O father! father!"

"Be quiet. He had to die. Do I make a moan about it? Call Dinah to make thee a cup of coffee. I am going to thy father now.

If he had been able to reproach her at this minute, he would not have done so. She looked at him with an air of defiance he had no heart to gainsay. He sat down, and Martha Leigh went at once to her dead husband. Lancelot heard her moving about, heard her opening drawers, heard her fling wide the sashes, heard her unlock a door little used, and go up the narrow stairs to the garret; and then a quick, sick fear came into his heart. Would she end her remorse by death? Would she follow her husband through the great sidereal spaces, and defend herself to him?"

He was asking such questions as he sped rapidly after her. At the foot of the garret stairs they were answered. She had locked the door within, but he heard her imploring, justifying, speaking to the dead man and the living God in an agony of entreaty and protestation. At length she began to weep, to sob, to cry out, like a woman in strong physical pain might cry.

He stood still, with lips firmly set and face as white as death. If all had been silent, he would have broken open the lock and gone to her. Death he must prevent, but suffering— No! She ought to suffer. It was her only chance for salvation. Yet he watched with her—watched until he heard her slowly coming down the stair. Then he went to his own room and put away some things he valued, and packed a small trunk which he intended to take with him.

Among his music he found the song he had written, "To Francesca," rare Ben Jonson's rare love-song. He put it to his lips with passionate longing and distress. Never again would he hold her dear hand, and sing it to her smiles and kisses. He was the son of a woman

who had—let her husband die. He could not say, he could not endure to think, the one awful word which yet lay in his deepest consciousness, which he passed by with shut eyes and forced oblivion. He was her son. How, then, could he be Francesca's lover? How could he ever hope to be her husband? The tenderness, the sweetness, the purity of the one woman stood afar off from the cruelty, the hardness, the earthliness of the other.

Yet his mother was his mother. Her blood beat in his heart; she was part and parcel of his personality. He could no more escape from her than he could alter the color of his hair, or take an inch from his stature. He told himself that he would not escape from her if he could; she was still his mother. He found it already possible to begin looking for excuses for her; physical reasons and extremities for her act; assuring himself, as a final and decisive cause, that his father still loved her. He had now supernatural insights, he would know the spring of her deliberate cruelty, he would have forgiven her; at least, he would wish him to protect her as far as it was possible.

How far that should be was the question Lancelot had now to answer. But his mind was in a tumult; he could not think. How, then, could he decide? In an hour his mother called him.

"There is a bit of breakfast ready," she said. "Thou hed better eat, if ta wants to act like a sensible man."

He wondered how he could bear to sit at the table and break bread with her. Perhaps she had thought of this difficulty; the table was only laid for him.

"I hev hed all I want," she said.

Then he had a moment's relenting, and he answered:

"Let me give you a cup of coffee, mother."

"I hev hed what I want. Thou knows I never was one to eat and drink. What hes ta dressed thysen for? Where is ta going?"

"I am going into Leeds. There are things to attend to."

"Yes, I know. And then?"

"I am going away from England—when I have seen the end."

He ceased speaking; he was visibly in the greatest sorrow.

"Dry thy eyes. If there is crying to do, I'll do it. And thou art not going away. Thou hes Leigh now to look after. The varry garden would grow dazy and lonely without a master to walk in it. Thy place is here, and here thou must stop."

"I am going to America—to Mexico. If, as you say, the dead come back here, father shall not find me filling his emptied place. I'll touch nothing that was his. It would be taking stolen property—worse still."

"Take care what thou says to me."

Martha Leigh was a tall, imposing woman, still handsome; and as she warned Lancelot, and stood up to do so, she appeared unnaturally tall. Her large face was colorless, her black eyes burned with a sullen fire, and her lace cap, with its wide, fluted borders, gave her the air of a pythoness under excitement. She looked her son steadily in the face, and said, with a glance of majestic defiance:

"Be sparing of thy words to me. Whatever I hev done, I hev done well. It is all right, and He knows it now."

“How could it be right to treat my father so cruelly?”

“Thy father should hev done his duty to them that hed the first claim on him. Why-a! He was on the point of selling his house to save his mill! Did ta iver hear tell of such wickedness? Going to turn the dead and the living out, and put strangers—or worse still, the Newbys—into these rooms. If he was a Leigh, he deserved to be sent where he would learn his duty better. If he was not a Leigh, but just some stray soul that had got away from his awn people, then he hed no business here: and the sooner he went to his awn, the better for him, and for us.”

“Mother, I can only hope and pray that you are not sane on this subject.”

“I am as sane as thou art, and a good bit saner. I know what I hev done, and I am well pleased with mysen for doing it. Now then, do thy duty. I expect so much from thee. Sell that big, ugly mill. Get rid of them hundreds of men and women who hev eaten up all our substance. Set thysen to take care of Leigh House and Farm, make it fairer and bigger than iver it was before, and I’ll welcome any wife thou chooses to bring here. And if ta must hev something to do that is more money-making than sowing and reaping, study and make thysen a doctor, or a lawyer. Now then, I hev hed my say. Speak for thysen.”

“I say that I will touch nothing that was father’s, and still ought to be father’s—neither mill nor house. I am going to Mexico.”

“And who is to be master of Leigh? It hes niver been without a master before, not in hundreds of years.”

“Do as you will with it; I could not live under this

roof. O mother, mother! You have ruined my life as well as—"

'Say the words in thy heart, Lance—'as well as murdered my father.' I am not afraid of any word, and I did not murder him. I gave him his chance. There hev been hours lately when I hev seen him talking to Joshua Newby that I could hev stabbed him with the knife I was cutting his bread and meat with. I did not do it; for thy sake—for thy sake only. I thought it might hurt thee with that fine lass thou hes set thy foolish heart on—thought it might mebbe be a red stain on ivery year of thy life. So I waited, and I gave him his chance. He hed a tussle with Death, and I neither helped one or the other. Most folks think doctors are as much on the side of death as life."

"What does father think now, looking back upon life?"

"I hope to goodness he thinks different to what he did. If he doesn't, he is only one against me, and there are hundreds and thousands ready to say: 'Martha Leigh did right for Leigh.' The land stays; the man goes. Stand by the land, then. Now, don't thee go away, Lance."

Lancelot shook his head and rose from the table. He could not continue a conversation so painful. He went back to his father's room, and looked again at the still figure. His mother had washed and straightened him.

A fine linen winding-sheet smelling of lavender was around him. His large hands were clasped across his breast. His face was full of peace; his thick brown hair had not a strand of gray, and it curled thickly all over the grandly domed head. The wind that came out

of the garden and from off the wolds stirred it gently upon the sunken temples. The room was as sweet and white as if it was a bride- and not a death-chamber.

Lancelot held a long session in it. There he faced the inevitable results of his mother's crime. Whether she was morally responsible or not for it, the world would hardly take time to inquire. Its verdict would be sharp and swift, and it was as likely as not that, in some moment of irritation, she would dare its utmost. To bring Francesca into relationship with such sorrow and shame would be wicked and cruel; dishonorable to do it without the full knowledge and consent of the squire; chimerical to hope that his consent would ever be given. He was also sure that he had no right to be his mother's accuser; sure that his good father, if he was alive, would plead for her, excuse her, and deprecate her suffering. It seemed best then, on every side, to go away and to leave to omniscient love and wisdom the unraveling of a destiny so cruelly tangled.

He then wrote to Francesca, and sent her the little love-song that was associated with the happiest hours of his life. He told her of his father's death, and his own sorrow in losing so sweet and strong a friend. He could not bear just yet to cut the tie between them. When he was at sea he would take time to consider; or at any rate he would wait until he was on the point of leaving England; and he wrote so truly, with all his heart:

"My Beloved: The space between us is full of my longing and heartache. It will be so, even when I am in Mexico. Oh, to kiss your foot-prints! to touch the hem of your robe! to feel the perfume of your presence! the magic of your beauty! the glory of your smiles and glances! *Francesca! Francesca! Angel of*

my hopes and dreams! Send me one loving thought each hour, for, if you do not, I shall perish miserably for want of it. Adorable Francesca! Live in happiness and sweetest peace.

“LANCELOT.”

And the words were realities. Their greatest reality was in their extravagance; their only untruthfulness in their poverty. Lovers will understand. Those who have never loved lack the special intelligence—let them pray God for the divine interpreter.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOVE'S DESPAIR.

Yes, it was love—if thoughts of tenderness
Tried in temptation, strengthened by distress,
Unmoved by absence, firm in every clime,
And yet—oh, more than all!—untired by time,
Which nor defeated hope nor baffled wile
Could render sullen.—*Byron.*

So writhes the mind Remorse hath riven;
Around it, flame; within it, death.—*Byron.*

THERE was a sweet credulousness about Miss Loida which was one of her greatest charms. She found it so easy to believe in good, to hope for good, and when disappointed, to begin hoping again. For ten years she had lived, not unhappily, in such hope and disappointment, and then renewed hope. She knew nothing of that fatal malady—the incapacity to be happy. It is true she had loved and she had suffered, and there had been hours in which she had felt nigh unto despair. But she had never been despondent; and there is this blessed difference between the two conditions: In despair there is life and activity, an infinite in an infinite sorrow; but despondency is only a fatal, somber dream on which the soul feeds secretly—a lotus leaf of languid, inert grief, not far from annihilation.

Every year about the autumn Loida went on a short journey. She was never more than two or three days

away, and yet it was an affair of great importance to her, and she pleasantly occupied many days in her preparations. No one spoke to her concerning it; the squire understood its object, and had long ago ceased to interfere; and Francesca, who had no restraints or reservations with her aunt on other subjects, felt a singular reluctance to question her on this one.

On a bright sunny morning in August Miss Vyner came down ready for her journey. The squire served her with kind empressement, and Francesca hovered around her with thoughtful care. They put her into the carriage with many kind words and wishes, but without a single message or question. And neither father nor daughter made a remark to each other about the strange, lonely excursion. Francesca understood there was some secret she ought to respect. The squire had too noble a nature to discuss circumstances sacredly personal to another.

Through a very thinly populated country Loida rode swiftly until the noon-hour. Then she came to a wayside inn, where she changed horses and took some refreshment. Afterward, her journey was among high hills and across desolate moors until toward sunset, when she approached a small town. It stood in the midst of an agricultural district; a strange old place, quiet as a dream. Its mortared houses were roofed with red tiles, and each one, even on the main street, was set in its own pretty garden. The bells of the ancient church were ringing for evening prayers as she passed slowly through the town and entered the gates of an inclosed place. There was a heavy mist among the timber, and no sign nor sound of life but the querulous inquiries of the rooks.

A short drive brought her in sight of a large white house. There was a glimmer of light in one of the lower windows, and as she approached, an old man wearing knee-breeches made of corduroy, and a mole-skin vest, came to meet the carriage.

"Mistress has been looking for you," he said. "Go your ways in, miss. You are varry welcome, I'll warrant."

She went in as if she knew the house well, through a long, flagged passage to a parlor at the end of it. An old lady was sitting at a small table drinking tea. She had a large cat on her knee, one of the real brown tortoise-shell that, as a pure breed, are now nearly extinct. She was talking to it as Loida entered, and she kept it in her arms as she rose with evident delight to welcome her.

"My dear," she cried cheerfully, "you are better than sunshine! I have been expecting you for a week. I had given you up for to-day."

"We were detained at least an hour. One of the horses I got at Hedmond's Inn was a poor one; but here I am at last."

"And freely welcome. Will you go to your room at once?"

"Yes, at once."

"You know the way, dear. Nothing changes. I try to keep everything the same."

Nothing had changed for at least ten years. Loida could have gone through the house with her eyes shut. She knew the lofty room to which she went as she knew her alphabet; knew its large, carved bedstead, with snowy trappings of Marseilles and ruffled lawn, and

hangings of rich, gold-colored brocade. She knew its polished floor, so difficult for her to walk on, its fine dressing-table and sets of drawers and ancient oak dower chests, its Wedgwood ewers and basins, its prayer-table with the open Bible, and the scent of roses everywhere—how well she knew the room!

She stood before the large mirror and looked earnestly at herself. Though there was only one old lady to see her, she was very anxious to appear handsome. She had dressed with great care in rich and becoming garments, and her habits were so quiet and reposeful that her journey had scarce ruffled her attire. She bathed her face and brushed out the long, soft curls of her brown hair, and put fresh lace at her throat, and then she smiled back at the lovely woman the glass showed her.

The consciousness of her beauty and grace gave her an air of distinction, and she went downstairs feeling that she was in a position to give and to receive pleasure. Some additions had been made to the tea-table; richer viands, more beautiful china, and some napkins of damask as fine as satin. The two women sat down at the table opposite to each other, and they made a very striking picture—the pretty old woman with the charm of life's afterglow over her gray, quiet head and pale, strong face—the pretty young woman in the full charm of her thirty years, flowing, graceful, high-bred, with eyes as clear as truth, and a face lovely as a perfect rose in the twilight; for roses then are soft and tender with the dew and mist, and drooping a little, as if hiding some sweet, sorrowful story.

At the first glance the elder woman's eyes looked dull

and soft and full of uncomplaining patience, but as soon as she began to talk her resolute soul filled them with fire and light.

"I have heard nothing," she said—"nothing at all, Loida, for nine months. If I had I should have written you."

"Silence is so cruel, mother."

"It is, my dear. If the dead could only speak or write it wouldn't be so hard, now, would it? Why don't they? If they live anywhere, why don't they speak?"

"I am sure Richard is not dead. If he were dead I should know it. I think he may be on his way home."

"Eh, my dear! What a thing it is to have hope always near you. Will I ever see Dick again, Loida?"

"I am sure you will, mother. I think he is coming very soon. He might come to-night as we sit talking of him."

"Nay, nay, Loida. Such a surprise as that would be could only happen in Pen-and-Ink Land. The son doesn't come home, and the lover doesn't come back that kind of way, except between book-covers. Never the bright hour, and the happy circumstance, and the loved one all together."

"Oh, dear mother, when Dick comes back he will make the right hour and the happy circumstance, and then all three will be together!"

"God bless you, Loida!"

"I am afraid you have been having hard times, mother. I never knew you despond before."

"I have been having things a bit crooked, my dear. Every which way has been contrary. It has been a bad year. Some valuable cattle died in the spring and

had to be replaced. And the two Swale children came of age this year, and their money was to raise. It was more than a thousand pounds. I had to sell two meadows and a fine mare to get enough. But then, what is land to Dick's honor?"

"Nothing at all, mother. Let the land go."

"And the house, too, if it be necessary. Eh, Loida?"

"To be sure, mother. Dick's good name is before everything. How about the interest?"

"I shall pull through this year. But oh, Loida, if he never comes home again!"

"He will come. It is impossible such love and self-denial will be made vain by death. Dick is sure to come. I have brought a trifle to help the interest account. I wish I was richer. I can do so little, mother."

"It is hard for you to scrimp yourself, only for Dick's good name."

"I hope Dick's good name is my good name. It is a great happiness to me that you take so frankly what I can do. Mother, I have only one fear, one great fear, about Dick coming home. What if he has forgotten me! What if he loves some one else! What if he—"

"Nay, nay, Loida, you know different. Dick has but one hope and thought, that is to put himself right for your sake. Every letter I have is set to this tune. My dear, he would be such a scoundrel as never was heard tell of if he could forget you or put any other woman before you."

"It is ten years since—women change so much in ten years."

"You have grown lovelier every year, Loida. When Dick went away, you were nothing but a slip of a girl.

You were only a rose shut up in green leaves. You were just the possible glory of the woman you have grown to be. The bud in the green case has become the perfect rose, and, my dear, there is no naming the bud and flower together. Nobody would care for a rose-tree if they didn't know the buds would grow to flowers. I have told Dick in every letter I could send him what a beauty you had become. If Dick could forget you, I could find it in my heart to forget Dick."

"It is only a passing fear, mother. Dick is too fine a fellow to be false."

"Yet you know, Loida, that many people once said hard things of Dick. He partly deserved them, too; I, his mother, say that."

"Dick made a great mistake. He is doing his best to put the wrong right. He has put much of it right. When he pays the uttermost farthing, what else can be required of him? And Dick has suffered, also. We must think of that."

All that night till very late, and all the next day, the two women talked of Dick. In the sweet old sunny garden they talked of him, and recalled a thousand things he had done and said among its fruits and flowers. In every fair, old-fashioned room of the house they talked of him. Every room was full of Dick. Through ten years of absolute absence his personality retained a hold on each. His picture at various ages hung throughout the house. In one room Baby Dick smiled and held his toes, and his mother stood before it with her mother-soul in her face. In another there was Dick as a school-boy. In another he looked uncomfortably conscious in his academical gown and square

cap. There was a full-length painting in oils of Dick at his majority in the drawing-room. There was one in the library of "Captain Richard Alderson" in the glory of a militia uniform. Dick in cricketing suits and yachting suits; Dick masquerading as Romeo; Dick on his favorite hunter; Dick in every picturable situation was present.

"They are all a great comfort to me," the mother said. "When I get a fear about him, I walk through the rooms and look at them all. There are so many Dicks I cannot help feeling that one of them must surely come back."

"The very best of Dicks will come back. Dear me, mother, what a day it will be! He is sure to come here first of all. You will send a man to tell me. Don't trust to the post. We are so out of the way it might be days before I got the letter."

"I will send the very hour Dick comes. Toby will do the distance on Sylvia's back in six hours."

"I shall listen, then, for the beat of Sylvia's feet. And whenever I hear a galloping horse, I shall be sure it is Sylvia. O mother! mother! What if Toby was to send in a month—in a week—the very day after I leave you. Don't you feel as if Dick was nearly here? I do."

"Sixty-five cannot feel as thirty does."

"Would you wish it?"

"Ay, I would, just for Dick's home-coming. For an hour I would like to feel as I did when I was thirty—feel in every nerve and pulse. Yes, I would, though I used up ten years of life in that hour."

"Will he not be astonished when he comes back and finds out all you have done?"

"No; I don't think he will. He would know it in his heart. Dick knows his mother so well. He would be sure I would do the topmost thing possible. But I'll tell you what, Loida. He will be astonished and delighted to find out how much you have helped me—scrimping yourself for his sake. My word! I think when I tell him all you have done, he will find out tears he never had before; he will find out deep places in his heart he would not ever have found out in any other way."

"I see his dog is still about; and won't he be astonished to find Tabby still purring on his chair-cushion?"

"Tabby does not purr much now. She has not purred much since Dick went. Really, when I come to think of it, I do not think she has ever considered anything worth purring about since. And as for Chief! Chief is always watching. The look of inquiry in his big brown eyes is more than I can bear sometimes. It says to me so plainly: 'When will Dick come home?'"

This one day every year was the heart holiday of Mrs. Alderson and of Loida Vyner. Whatever they might have to do other days, this one was Dick's, and Dick's only. They filled it with recollections of him and with hopes for him. It was the heart-food on which they both lived many other days. It went all too quickly away. And in spite of Loida's charming anticipations, no glad surprise came to them in it; not even a white-winged letter of hope. They parted as they had met, in the visible presence of a sad certainty, in the passionately expressed glamour of a future hope.

Loida's heart fell as soon as she left Alderson Bars.

It grew heavier with every lonely mile. She had spent her stock of hope so lavishly, she had none now left for her own necessity. Her thoughts wandered far, and yet brought nothing back but that truly English word "*Why?*" *Why* had Dick done so wrong? *Why* did he not come? *Why* did he not write? The little plaintive questioning word, almost poetical in itself, grew tragic in its persistent iteration.

It was after sunset when she reached Atherton, and that twilight dejection, which even animals feel, had intensified the melancholy of her mood. She had ceased even to expect the "improbable letter" of the future. But oh, how soon all shadows fled before the light in Francesca's face, and the hearty welcome in the squire's greeting! How many good things were yet left her! How much love! What a happy home! Her coming to it made an air of rejoicing through the house. Tea had been delayed that they might take it with her.

She threw off her sense of trouble and disappointment by a conscious effort, as she threw off her cloak and bonnet, and then turned with smiles to her brother and niece. Something strange and unlooked for had happened; she saw a shadow of it about the squire. She perceived it in the face and manner of Francesca. But they talked for a little while on the most commonplace and indifferent of things—the weather, the crops in that part of the country through which Loida had passed, the poor horse Hedmond had given her; the catching of a fox in Atherton hen-coops, finally the condition of Atherton village.

"It is bad enough," said the squire. "I am very sorry for poor Lance. When trouble comes, it comes

every way at once, I think. Francesca tells me Lance's father is dead. I am very sorry!"

"It is true," said Francesca, answering her aunt's look of sorrowful amazement. "Lance's last letter said his father was very ill; but his death must have been unexpected, I think. Lance writes like a man distracted."

"He was particularly fond of his father," said Loida. "I never saw a father and son so much one."

"I liked that," answered the squire warmly. "I liked the way in which Lance stood by his father's advice and word. And I am sure Stephen Leigh was a fine man. I am sorry I quarreled with him. It hurts me to think I was speaking badly of him yesterday, and him not on earth to answer me back. My word! It is a dangerous thing to talk badly of the absent. You never know whether they may not be closer to God than you are."

They talked all evening of this subject, but no one named it as it mainly appealed to Francesca. Her first reflection had been: "Now Lance cannot go away from England. There will be Garsby Mill and Leigh Farm and his mother to look after." But she gave no utterance to her thought, for it seemed selfish and unfeeling.

Neither did the squire speak of any change in Lance's prospects; perhaps he, also, considered it would be unfeeling; or perhaps he did not speak of such a result because he did not wish it. At any rate, it was not alluded to; but Francesca kept the possibility as a new hope in her heart. Yet she felt hurt and offended that no one had foreseen such a

change, and given her the comfort of discussing it. Under the circumstances silence seemed almost active ill-will against her lover.

The next morning the squire announced his intention of going to Stephen Leigh's funeral.

"I can stay with my friend Thomas Idle," he said. "No doubt he will be going to Leigh, and I think it is only right I should go, too—for Lancelot's sake. Nay, then, I'll not put Lancelot's cloak over my doings. I'll go because I think well of Stephen Leigh. It was only as the mill-owner and spinner I didn't like him. He was as honest and straightforward a gentleman as ever lived."

Thus it is that death opens the eyes of the living, and permits excellencies to be seen not acknowledged before its revealing touch.

So that day Squire Atherton went to Idleholme, from which place he sent a message of sympathy to Lancelot. But he did not go to Leigh Farm until the day of the funeral—a soft, misty, warm day, full of a still melancholy. There was a great company present, and the little graveyard on the windy wold was crowded with middle-aged gentlemen, squires, and spinners, who had been Stephen Leigh's friends and acquaintances—tall, handsome men mostly; full of a splendid vitality, subdued and solemnized by the shadow of death and the thrilling words of the white-surpliced priest at the open grave.

The service over, the crowd dispersed very silently. The majority were on their own hunters, and they rode through the green lanes bordered with ripe wheat in a silent, thoughtful mood. They had to pass Leigh Farm, and Squire Atherton stopped there. He really

felt as if he ought to give Lancelot some personal sympathy, and also find out how so unlooked-for a calamity would affect his future movements.

The place appeared to be deserted. No one came to take his horse, and he led it to 'the nearest stable. Then he entered the house by an open door. He could hear footsteps in the room above, but there was not a sound in the lower part of the house except the humming of the bumble-bees flying in and out of the open windows. He saw the dead man's empty chair on the hearthstone. His pipe was across the rack in the chimney-corner, his tobacco-jar and almanac lay on a little shelf beside it. The senseless objects had an uncomfortable and pathetic eloquence. He disliked a solitude so full of voices, and he touched a hand-bell upon the sideboard very sharply.

The resonant call was answered by a heavy footstep upon the stairs. It came toward him with a slow, fateful sound—a sound full of unhappy presentiment. He had a moment's irresolution about remaining to answer his own call, but as he hesitated Martha Leigh opened the door and came into the room.

He was shocked by her gray, stony face, and dark, glowing eyes. Her stare of inquiry frightened him. But he understood at once that it was the widow, and he respected a grief so evident and so awful.

"Mrs. Leigh," he said gently, "I am Squire Ather-ton. I called to see Lancelot."

"He hasn't come from the funeral yet."

"He will be here soon, I suppose?"

"I can't tell thee. He was feeling badly, and spoke of going to see Dr. Thorpe."

"I am very sorry for your affliction, madam."

"I am sure I don't know why thou should be."

"I supposed you were aware that your son Lance-
lot—"

Then the squire stopped; he had a sudden dislike to naming his daughter.

"I know that Lance hes thought hissen in love with Miss Atherton, but as for wedding with her—"

"Madam, the days of death and burial are not for the discussion of love and marriage. That subject can wait its season."

"I was going to say a few words that will suit all seasons—going to say that there is now a reason why my son can never marry Miss Atherton. He knows! He knows! Find another husband for thy lass, squire. She can never wed my Lance. If ta knew all Lance knows, thou would put her in her winding-sheet before thou would see her don wedding-clothes to be his wife."

She stood with one hand upon the large center-table, looking straight into the squire's face, and she spoke with a still passion that was terrible. A suspicion that she was "not herself" was forced upon the squire. He answered her accordingly with some indifferent words, which he meant to be soothing and conciliating. She listened to them with scornful temper, and answered promptly:

"Thou needn't think I am out of my senses. I niver had better hold of them all. I know right well that thou niver wanted Lance in thy family. I don't blame thee. I don't want thy fine daughter among the Leighs. Well, then, thou can go thy ways home with

a light heart. Thou hated Stephen Leigh, and thou hes hed the pleasure of seeing him put under clay ; and thou hated the thought of Lance Leigh coming courting *Miss Francesca*. Now I tell thee he niver can do so any more."

"You ought to give me some reason for your assertions, Mrs. Leigh."

"Ask me no questions. I shall mebbe tell thee lies if ta does. Lance knows '*why*.' But Lance will niver tell thee. Niver! Get thee home, now. What does ta come here for, anyway? If I was only thy match in size and strength, I'd know '*why*.' What does ta come here for?"

She asked the question with such hatred and passion the squire was really terrified. He was sure now that the woman was insane, and his anger turned to pity. He regarded the tall, comely widow, stricken with so sad and lonely a visitation, as something sacred. She had felt the finger of God, and had not been able to mentally survive that mighty touch. Instead of answering her question, he bowed slightly, and made as if he would leave the room.

She watched his movements with satisfaction. She went before him to the door and held it open.

"Don't thee come here any more," she said. "I want nothing to do with thee, nor with any one belonging to thee. I hev seen thy daughter. She is none of our kind. And I'll dare Lance to talk of wedding her. Make thysen easy on that score. He'll niver do it now. Niver!"

"Madam, your misfortune insures my sympathy and respect. Good-afternoon."

"When I ask thee for sympathy or respect, then thou can give them to me. And my misfortune, as ta calls it, is mine, and I can bear it without thy help. Go thy ways, and a 'good-afternoon' to thee, if ta calls this one."

Never in all his life had Squire Atherton been treated with such painful freedom. Anger and pity strove together in his heart, but anger was doubtless the most lasting of the two feelings. He was muttering his annoyance and offense all the time he unfastened his horse, and he rode away from Leigh Farm full of wrath and indignant protest.

"Just what I deserve! Just what I deserve! Why did I trouble myself about Stephen Leigh? I have always had annoyance, and nothing but annoyance, with him and with his. It is enough to make a man vow never to do a kind thing again. I came with a pitiful heart, and that n .woman told me I came for the pleasure of seeing Stephen Leigh put under clay. My word! It is hard to do right. *Dal it!* I have let my soft heart lead me on a fool's errand. But thanks be! I'm not bound to go that road again. And as for my little lass—God love her!—I will see her in her winding-sheet ere I'll let her take a husband out of such a railing nest."

Burning with chagrin and a sense of injury, he pursued his way. On the moor he met Lancelot. He was quite alone and riding very slowly, with his head bent and reins dropped loosely down. He looked completely worn out and exceedingly sorrowful. As the squire drew near, Lancelot recognized him; and he stopped his horse altogether. But in spite of a certain

pity for the youth, the squire was intensely angry. He made no attempt to stop, but touching his hat in passing, went rapidly onward; apparently indifferent to the lonely figure gazing after him, with eyes dilating with wonder and wounded feeling.

Lancelot had a letter from Francesca over his heart, which he had just received. It was full of tender love and sympathy. It spoke of her father's sorrow and of the genuine respect which had moved him to attend the funeral. What, then, did that formal recognition mean? It was such a greeting as might have been given to the most indifferent stranger. Lancelot felt the sting and humiliation of this worry, even in the deep sorrow and the awful doubts that gathered like thick clouds across his hopes and his love.

His mother met him with a strange timidity. She was not aware of it, indeed; she was nursing purposes in her heart which were at total variance with the feeling. But when Lancelot entered the parlor, she looked stealthily at him. His miserable face and his silent, restrained manner troubled and yet irritated her. For his sake and his interests she had robbed herself of love and love's companionship, and bespoke life-long sorrow and remorse. Right or wrong, she felt that her self-denial ought to be recognized and appreciated. For she reasoned only from her own standpoint, and quite forgot that Lancelot, both by nature and education, was not only incapable of reasoning with her, but was firmly convinced on views taken from an entirely different standpoint.

She motioned to his father's chair and drew it toward the table, on which a frugal meal was laid. Lancelot

shrank with visible pain from the empty seat. With gentle hands he lifted the chair back to its place. Tears dropped upon the cushion, and oh, what bitter-sweet memories crowded around that old empty chair!

Martha Leigh watched him with gathering anger.

"Take the chair," she said in a shrill voice, full of stifled feeling—"take thy father's chair; it is surely good enough for thee to fill. It is thine now."

"It is not mine."

"All that was his is thine. I hev said that before."

"Nothing that was his is mine. I will not touch a penny's worth. I have told you that before."

"Hes ta lost thy senses?"

"I have at least the fullest sense of my duty to my father. Father went away—or was sent away—before his time. Whatever was his is still his; not mine."

"It is thine."

"I swear before God it is not mine! Nor will I touch a farthing of it, nor put myself in his place for one moment! My dear, good father, who never wronged me by one thought! Shall I wrong him in all that pertained to him—honor, place, land, house, and money? May God slay me first! I should well deserve it."

"Thou art an ungrateful son; a miserable Leigh. If ta has any manhood in thee, speak plainly to me, and not in shuffling words and riddles."

"Very well. I will ask you some plain questions—answer me as plainly: Did you purposely keep back the proper medicines from father?"

"Ay, I did. I was sorry I hed to do so, but it hed to be done."

"And he died in consequence?"

"He may, and he may not. I left it all in God's hands. Surely to Heaven! your father was as well there as in old Dr. Thorpe's hands."

"I can only hope that you were and are insane, mother."

"Nay, my lad, I hev all my senses. I am as sane, and a good bit saner, than either thy father was or thou art. My word! Any Leigh must hev been stark crazy who was standing, pen in hand as one may say, to sign away house and land. And that is what thy father would hev done, hed not the fever put a stop to such wickedness. I hev always been told that sickness comes from the hand of God. Well, then, I left thy father to the will of Him that sent the fever. I didn't interfere one way or t'other. God hed His awn will. Does ta think old Thorpe's medicines were stronger than His will?"

"Mother, such reasoning is wicked. You know you did wrong."

"I did quite right! I'll stand to that, alive or dead! I saved house and land for thee. Ay, and for all that follow thee."

"I will have neither house nor land. I am going away from England. How could I bear to stop here?"

"Thou wilt stop here. If ta goes away, whatever is to become of the property?"

"Do as you wish with it. If the dead Leighs are more to you than your living husband and son, give them the house. I will not share it with them."

"Thou art not worthy to do it."

"And if I stayed here, I should stay to carry out father's desire. I would mortgage—I would sell Leigh

House and land and keep the mill going, for that would keep a thousand families in bread."

"My word! Thou art a reprobate! Out of my sight! Out of my hearing! I'll niver own thee again! I know what thou is after. Thou wants to be lord and master at Atherton Court. And the Leighs' place may fall into anybody's or nobody's hands. Thou art a wicked one, and no mistake."

"I shall never now ask Miss Atherton to come into our family. How could I?"

"Thou hed better not. I told her father an hour ago she niver could marry thee. I gave the proud old fellow a set-down he won't forget in a hurry."

"O mother! mother! How could you shame me so? You have broken my heart twice over! How could you shame me so?"

"If ta can do nothing but cry, go to thy room. I hev my awn sorrow, and it is as much as I can bear. Does ta think I hev no feelings? Does ta think that doing my duty pays me for all I hev hed to give up? I tell thee there is a worm at my heart and a fire in my brain, and they will worry and burn me into my grave before they'll stop a moment!"

She swept the table clear with passionate haste as she spoke, locked the doors, and taking the candle off the table, went upstairs. Lancelot remained in the large, dark sitting-room. He wondered where his mother would go. She went straight to the room in which her husband had died. She had occupied it all her married life; she was evidently not going to resign her right to it because Death had taken her place there for a little while. Lancelot heard her close the windows; he heard

her heavy footfalls, her movements about the ambries and drawers, just as the squire had heard them a few hours before. She had been preparing the chamber for her use then; she was now preparing herself to lie down in it, and sleep such sleep as was possible to her.

Lancelot sat still thinking. However hopeless a man may be, he must still think and still plan; for life, somehow, must be got over, and a grave fairly and honestly earned. At this hour all else had vanished; hope for better days seemed hopeless. He could not bear to contemplate taking one penny from his father's estate. He could not think of the estate as belonging in any shape to him. His father's unnatural death, whether it was known to others or not, was known to him. He would have felt base beyond contemplation to have profited himself in any way by it.

But this was only the beginning of sorrows. He knew that Francesca must be given up. He compelled himself to face this terrible fact. His mother was insane, or she was in full intent a— He could not say the word; he tried not to be conscious of the letters that spelled it, but they would come before his eyes as if they were written in fire.

How could he tell Squire Atherton the real facts? And yet how shameful it would be to continue his engagement with his daughter, hiding them! How could he tell them to Francesca? It would be impossible. Then what should he say to account for the silence and desertion that must now cancel all their sweet hopes? Every explanation he thought of only made things worse; for at the last it came to these questions:

“Can I accuse my mother to Francesca? Can I accuse her to Francesca’s father? Would they be willing to risk the awful dread of inheritable insanity? Would they be willing to ignore the suspicion of a crime still more terrible?” In any case, was it his duty to betray either the misfortune or the crime of his mother? He could not feel in himself any particle of that Brutus-conscience which took the public into confidence or consideration. His mother was still his mother. He could find excuses for her no stranger would allow. He knew that her punishment had already begun. His desertion of her was a part of it.

Yes, in spite of his own overwhelming sorrow, even with the thought of sweet Francesca breaking his tender heart, he sobbed out with an almost divine compassion:

“My poor, wretched mother! God be pitiful to her!”

CHAPTER IX.

LOVE TIED IN A KNOT.

“A little sorrow, a little pleasure,
Fate metes us from the dusty measure
That holds the date of all of us.”

“Ah, but alas! for the smile of smiles that never but one face wore!

Ah, for the voice that has flown away, like a bird, to an unknown shore!”

“Welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,
And frequent sights of what is to be borne;
Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.”

IT is very hard to believe what goes against our wishes; and it was almost impossible for Francesca to believe that Lancelot would now really leave England. There seemed to be such good and valid reasons for his remaining at home, that, in spite of his melancholy letters and their certain air of change, Francesca would not consider his exile as a likelihood.

One morning in October, Miss Loida and her niece were in the garden together. It was a fresh, frosty morning, with plenty of sunshine. The squire had gone into the village on electioneering business, and the ladies, in spite of the contradiction in their love affairs, were not unhappy. Miss Loida was talking with the gardener, and she had her hands full of the latest asters.

Francesca stood on the terrace steps feeding her pigeons and laughing at the melting eyes they made to their perpetual song of "Love! Love! Love!" She was dressed in a gown of dark-blue cloth; it had little turned-over cuffs and collar of white linen, and the bright-brown ribbons of her straw hat fluttered about in the glancing sunlight. Her whole appearance, indeed, indicated a mood of serene pleasure—that delightful air of cheerful happiness which surrounds those who can enjoy ordinary life without the excitement of passion or appetite.

Now, as Francesca scattered the wheat, she looked toward the house, and saw a servant approaching her. He had the morning's mail on a salver, and he gave Francesca a letter, and then carried one to Miss Loida. Francesca's was from Lancelot. She finished giving the pigeons their breakfast with a little conscious hurry, and then went to the clematis arbor. Miss Loida had taken her letter into the house to read; Francesca was glad not to anticipate any interruption.

She sat down with the fateful square of paper in her hand and suffered her eyes to dally with her anticipated pleasure. She had been sure that every letter would bring her information of Lancelot's change of plans; she was quite sure this particular one was to set her heart at rest. In all her life she had no sorrows to anticipate, and she had been accustomed to have all her desires granted. It was inconceivable to her that Lancelot should not manage to make her happy in the way she desired. She had even begun to feel that he had carried delay in the matter quite long enough for her patience and pleasure. So she opened the envelope

finally with that air of decision which contains in it a certain demand that expectation shall be satisfied, and these were the words she read :

“ Farewell, adorable Francesca ! Farewell ! Farewell forever ! In an hour I shall leave England, certainly for some years, perhaps for the remainder of life. I do not ask for your remembrance ; let me be forgotten as soon as possible. For a great misfortune has come to me ; one utterly inconceivable and unforeseen ; and I would die rather than make you a sharer in it. Only believe that, though I suffer, I am innocent of all wrong in thought, word, or deed. It is misfortune that I can neither avert nor explain. If I say that I am broken-hearted, I say too little. I am compelled to put love from me. I am compelled to abandon hope. I retain life, only because it would be cowardly to resign it. Forget one so miserable. Forget the sweet hours we have passed together ; all our innocent dreams ; all our blessed hopes for the future. I am too wretched a man to remain in your thoughts. O beloved Francesca ! My heart bleeds and breaks. Farewell forever.

LANCELOT.”

She read the letter through, at first rapidly, then with a forced and rigid deliberation, letting her eyes take in, with clear and positive certainty, every word and letter. She did not cry or faint, or evince any passionate sense of the crushing sorrow that had come to her. Some hot tears filled her soft, shining eyes, but they were not shed. She sat still, letting every miserable word smite her like a blow. Only yesterday she had wept with angry impatience because a careless servant had let loose into a cruel world of cats and boys a cage-bred canary. But to-day she had no tears for the anguish which had come to her own heart.

It was at first almost an impossible sorrow. She did not, she could not believe in it. Why should such grief

come to her? "Am I awake?" she asked, with amazed and almost indignant incredulity.

She had, also, a kind of painful shame in being so cruelly deserted. Why had not Lancelot come to bid her "Good-bye"? Surely there was no misfortune he could not tell her about. She felt that she was strong enough and loving enough to bear any misfortune, however great it might be, with him. Why had he not, then, trusted her?

Besides, there was an uncertainty about the letter which tortured her most of all. Lancelot said he was leaving England, but he did not say to what part of the world he was going. He did not ask her to write to him; he had even made it impossible for her to send him a letter. He said he was going away for years—that he might never come back. What conceivable misfortune could there be to drive a lover, a young man of family and wealth and fine prospects, forever from his home and his native land, especially when he declared himself to be an innocent and irresponsible victim?

She could not imagine one. Indeed, Francesca was singularly unable to imagine situations of sorrow or of evil fortune. The world had been such a happy world to her. She had never supposed circumstances in the which love could fail to comfort her, or hope be turned into despair. The first hour of the experience was stunning and stupefying, and she was only conscious of a dumb rebellion against some terrible suffering and deprivation.

When Miss Loida came to seek her niece, Francesca had for the first moment or two a sense of anger at any intrusion into the bitterness of her grief. But the real

sweetness of her nature soon prevailed, for Loida was no silly intermeddler with another's trouble. She allowed the sorrowful girl to be still until she chose to speak. She knew that it was sufficient for Francesca to feel her at her side, and to be sure of her sympathy.

"I have had a bad letter, Aunt Loida—a cruel letter, I think."

Then she put it into her aunt's hand, and watched her read it.

"It is a cruel letter, Francesca. And if it hurts you to get it, what must poor Lancelot have suffered in the writing of it! Yes, indeed! One can feel the heart-break in every line."

"What can be the reason for it, aunt?"

"I cannot tell you. But I am sure Lancelot is not to blame in any way. Poor fellow! How he must be suffering! God help him!"

"I am suffering also, aunt."

"I know you are. Oh, I know you are! But you have your dear father to love and comfort you, and you have Aunt Loida to suffer every pang with you; and you have a good home and plenty of money, and many friends. Lancelot has just buried a father whom he idolized. He has no friends but you and me. For some reason—I am sure a good one, as far as he is concerned—he is homeless, friendless, without much money, and an exile from his own land and people, and, above all, obliged by his love and honor to give back your love and allegiance. Can you conceive of a man in a more pitiable condition, of a man more worthy of sympathy and love? Yes, dear, I say love. If I were in your place I should love him ten thousand times

more for his noble resignations and resolutions; I am sure they are noble. I would not believe the whole world against Lancelot's simple assertion, that he has done nothing worthy of his suffering. Would you, dear?"

"No, I would not."

"That is right. Then the sting is out of your sorrow. To love worthily, that is everything."

"But when he tells me not to love him—tells me to forget him—when he has hid himself away from me so that I cannot even send him a letter, what am I to do?"

"Go on loving him all the more. Go on thinking about him all the more. Do everything possible to find out where he has gone to, and then send him the sweetest, tenderest messages you can write. That is what you ought to do, dear. I dare be sure that we shall find him out. His mother will certainly know in a little time. Then, of course, she would tell you, because she would hope that you could bring him home; and, of course, she will want him home."

"She is a very strange woman, Loida."

"I dare say she is a very awkward and disagreeable woman; but, then, it is the *mother in the woman* you will have to deal with. All mothers are gentle and kind, I am sure. Everything will come right, Francesca—I am sure it will—and you will love each other when Lancelot comes back as you never could have loved had you not been separated. Ah, Francesca, all women, in one way or other, have to find out that of all the sorrowful things in life the hardest of all is loving."

And the girl was for the time consoled, because Loida understood that in the first hours of sorrow comfort

must often consist in promising the impossible, and in asserting whatever is the desire of the wounded heart. Francesca wished to believe all that Loida said; she therefore accepted her assurances, and took what hope they promised her. Another course might have been more prudent and less kind. As it was, Francesca suffered very much. No one knew at the time how much, for the circumstances seemed to suddenly develop in her girl-heart a woman's reticence and noble restraint. For some days the affair was not spoken of again, and the squire noticed the pallor of his daughter's face and the singular stillness of her manner.

"Whatever is the matter with my little girl?" he said to Miss Vyner one afternoon. "She is either sick or in trouble. Is it about that young man, Loida?"

"Things are not very pleasant about him, are they, Rashleigh?"

"No, they are not. I am not to blame, am I, now?"

"I cannot say you are."

"Well, then?"

"Nay, brother, I never talked much about my own trouble; it is not likely I will talk of Francesca's. I dare say she will tell you sooner or later, whatever there is to tell."

"Has he gone away yet? Tell me that much."

Before Loida could answer, the door opened and Francesca entered. The squire looked kindly at her, and drew her chair close to his own. She sat down and laid her head against his big breast, and as he silently stroked her head, she began to cry. He was much moved. His voice trembled with the tears in it, as he said:

"Francesca! Why, honey! Why, joy! Whatever is the matter?"

"Lancelot has gone away from England, father."

"He will come back, I'll be bound!"

"He says he will not come back. He gave me back my troth. He says I must forget him forever."

"The impudent rascal! He gave thee back thy troth! My word, but he was never worthy of thee!"

"Father, you must not say a word against Lancelot. It is because he is so noble, so honorable, so truly fond of me that he gave up our engagement. I want you to find out where he has gone to. He did not tell me."

"Nay, my dear, I will not do that. If he has gone, let him go. Francesca Atherton is not such a lass as to run after a sweetheart—prince or spinner."

"Father, dear, Lancelot was something more than a passing sweetheart. We had only one heart and one life between us. If anything happens to Lancelot, I shall die too."

"Nay, thou wilt not. Thou hast more sense than to break thy heart for any man. *Why-a!* it is not maidenly to talk that way."

"Father, I do not live in scraps and little bits as some women do; an hour of love and an hour of merry-making, a thought about money and a thought about marriage and so on—I love you with all my heart—I would not for one week give you up, father, to be queen of England. I love Lancelot in the same altogether way. Lancelot has gone away because he has a misfortune he will not let me share. I want to find out where he has gone to, for I want to write to him and tell him I would gladly share all his misfortunes.

Father, here is his last letter. Read it. Any one may read the words of a love so broken-hearted."

The squire took the letter with some reluctance, and only read it because Francesca's head upon his heart made her pleading irresistible.

"It is a middling bit of despair," he said, when he had glanced at Lancelot's "farewell." "And I must say the lad has done the very best thing possible under the circumstances."

"But what circumstances, father?"

"My dear, I do not know that I can say 'what circumstances.' I may have my suspicions, but I have no right to give them a name. It would never do to put suspicions into words; that might be the biggest wrong of all. But I will say this much: Lancelot is in no way to blame, I am sure. I hold him to be square and honorable as a man can be."

"Then find out where he has gone to, father."

"I'd rather not. Thou might write to him."

"Yes, I would write to him."

"It would not be kind of thee. Forget, and let him forget."

"No; I will not forget. He may forget, if he can. I will not forget. I will remember, and I will love him to the end of my life."

"Dear me! What stubborn stuff women are made of!" And he looked half reproachfully at Loida, who sat, with an expression of approval on her face, opposite to him.

"Brother," she answered, in reply to his accusing glance—"brother, it is a very good thing for men generally that women are made of stubborn stuff. I cannot

think what men would do if women were not so made as to believe black was white, and stand to their conviction."

"To be sure! To be sure!"

"Father, you will find out for me where Lancelot has gone to. I cannot do such a thing as that for myself. Can I?"

"I should think not. Don't thee cry in such a way as that. Thou breaks my heart. I will do what thou asks me to do; but I tell thee plainly I would a deal rather not do it. And don't thee try my love too far. I would call it taking a mean advantage of a fond heart."

He rose with the words, and going to the window, he said:

"It is raining hard. But I think I will go to the stables a bit. There are always things that should be done there in bad weather. And they will not get done if somebody does not see after them."

It was an errand made to escape the sorrowful atmosphere of the room, and perhaps neither of the women was sorry for it. The squire was evidently only sympathetic in a small degree, and Francesca felt as if the world ought to turn upon the axis of her loss. Nothing else in it appeared worth thinking about or conversing about, and she sat down in the large chair her father had just vacated, the very picture of woe.

For a short time Loida remained silent. The rain beat against the windows; the fog shut the nearest trees and shrubs from sight; vision was restricted to the room in which they sat; and, except for the leaping, blazing fire and the shining steel grate and hearth furniture, the room partook of the gloom outside. The pictures were dim, the furniture almost black, the carpets darkly inde-

terminate, the curtains had a depressed "hang," the china ornaments a ghostly pallor, and there was no cheerful sound to appeal to another sense; only the wind wailing round the garden and dashing the loose ivy sprays against the casements.

Youth is so impatient of suffering, and Francesca was not only amazed, but almost indignant, at the cruel fate which had suddenly deprived her of her happiness. Always before, in all her small trials, she had received instant and unqualified sympathy; always before the squire had been sufficient to bring her help or relief. She would not believe but that he could, if he would, bring back Lancelot. She was sure Lancelot was going away for want of money, and she felt her father's silence on this subject to be particularly unfeeling. She had still a childish idea that her father's resources were unlimited; and she was certainly feeling, at that hour, that the chief and most desirable use of money was to bring home again her lover.

"What is the use of being rich," she asked Loida, "if you cannot use riches to save love? There is nothing on earth better than love, eh, Loida?"

"Yes, there are things better than love—nobler than love—without which any love worth having cannot exist."

"That is not so, Loida. Love is everything. I would give my life for my love."

"You might give your life, but yet there is something you would not give, something more precious than life—*honor*. I know what you are thinking, Francesca. I know you are inclined to blame your good father for not offering Lancelot money enough to keep him in

England. My dear, if Lancelot had taken such money, I, for one, would despise him. In a little while you would despise him also. A man who cannot support a wife has no business with one. To take a man's daughter is a great demand upon any father's heart, yet a lover for the daughter's sake may find courage to ask so much—but to take money also! We will not discuss a contingency like that. It is out of honorable consideration, and I am sure Lancelot is an honorable gentleman."

"It is easy to talk of 'honor,' Loida. Honor! Honor! What is it? A noisy nothing, invented by the proud. Am I to lose love for honor? And how is Lancelot's honor at stake? I do not understand. He spent all his money in that dreadful mill, for his honor. Our marriage was put off because his money was gone, and it was not 'honorable' to ask for me while he was poor. One can understand how poor women suffer for love, in some way or other, all their lives long. But it is not fair to throw 'honor' at their hearts also."

"Being what you are, Francesca, honor obliges you to be noble in all things; and so to nobly deny yourself, even in love."

"I shall die for 'honor,' then. I cannot live long without Lancelot."

"Other women have loved and lost, and lived on."

"I am not 'other women.' Every one is cruel to me, even Lancelot. Why did he go away without seeing me? If there was any dishonor in the case, I would have forgiven him the dishonor."

"Lancelot would never forgive himself. I should say that a dishonorable thought was impossible to him."

There may be circumstances unknown to any one, making it a kind of dishonor to see you again. And do not speak lightly of such self-denial. For no one can annul dishonor; it is irreparable, and though its loss may be forgiven, who can restore it? A fleece stained by the dyer never regains its whiteness. A character stained by dishonor never recovers the glory of a stainless integrity."

"Do not preach to me, Loida. I am so miserable."

There was a few minutes' silence. Francesca sat with her head thrown back and her eyes closed. Loida's hands were busy with her crochet, but her heart was in a tempest of feeling, of uncertainty, of pitiful sympathy. She glanced upward; the storm was unabated, the room growing more and more gloomy. Francesca's face was the image of despair; its pallor was the dull pallor of heartache. The child was suffering greatly; no one knew that better than Loida Vyner.

She came suddenly to a determination. Then she put aside her trifle of work and took her chair to Francesca's side. Francesca let her clasp her hand. It was cold, and the limp fingers made no responsive effort. She did not move or open her eyes or acknowledge in any way her aunt's attention to her. She had made up her mind to bear her sorrow without discussing it.

"Francesca, my dear."

"Yes, Aunt Loida."

"Look at me and listen to me. I am going to tell you about Dick Alderson: Dick was—I hope in God's mercy Dick *is yet*—my lover."

Then Francesca opened her eyes and looked with interest into her aunt's face.

"I never talk to any one about Dick. I have not uttered his name to mortal man or woman, except to his dear mother, for ten years; yet, Francesca, I love him—I love him with all my heart and soul. Must I tell you about Dick?"

"If you please, dear aunt."

"Your mother and I were co-heiresses of a small estate near Tiphham Market. Our parents died when we were young. We had no near relatives. The Aldersons were friends; we went there very often. Dick was their only child, and Dick loved me when I was a girl ten years old. At a ball in the city of York your mother met Squire Atherton, and when she married him I spent my time between this house and Alderson Bars. You know how you love Lancelot; so I loved Dick. There never was any other lover or thought in my heart.

"Dick's father and grandfather had been private bankers in Tiphham Market. The farmers and traders for twenty miles round used Alderson's bank, and thought it safer than the Bank of England. When Dick was twenty-seven years old his father died, and then he succeeded to the business. I was then seventeen, and it was decided that as soon as I was twenty Dick and I were to marry. My dear, I was so happy! I was so happy!"

"Was Dick handsome and good?"

"I have never seen any other man half so handsome. He had a charming face and a manner no one could resist. Old and young, rich and poor, loved Dick Alderson; and he really loved his fellow-creatures. O Francesca, for four years we loved each other without a shadow. For four years life was a love-song that we

sang together. For four years it was a wonderful love-story, and we two wrote it together. In the twilight in the garden; in the sunshine on the moor; in the dear old church, praying together; sitting hand in hand in the fire-lit parlor; dreaming the same dream, catching the same words from each other's eyes and lips. You know, Francesca?"

"I know—I know."

"It was near the day fixed for our marriage. Our house was furnished; my bridal dresses were ready; the company was bid to the wedding-feast. I had no fear of evil fortune. I thought it would always be well with me. I was as gay and busy as the birds building in the garden; so gay and busy I never noticed at the time that a singular shadow was on Dick's face; that he was silent and preoccupied, often making figures in his note-book and writing many letters, even when at home. I thought of these things afterward; at the time they were only a part of the great, the happy change which was coming into our lives.

"One afternoon, Dick came home very early. I was with his mother in a small parlor, and we were packing up in their baize-lined mahogany cases the silver which was to go with us to our own home. We stood over it at a table crowded with the shining pieces. Dick's face was as white as yours is at this moment. He came in quickly, and then went back and shut the door. His mother and I both looked inquiringly at him, he was so much earlier than we expected. Then he did not kiss us, as was his wont; but laying his hand on his mother's hand, he said, oh, so pitifully:

"Mother! Loida! I am a ruined man! Every-

thing is lost! I must go away instantly—this very hour. All will be known to-morrow.’”

“Aunt, how could you bear it?”

“We do not know what we can bear until we come to the moment of trial. I went to his side. His mother said :

“‘Sit down, Dick, and tell us the truth. What is the trouble, my dear?’”

“As she was speaking, we all sat down on the sofa, Dick sitting between us. I put my hand into his hand. He turned his face to his mother, and said :

“‘I have been speculating in railway stock. I thought it was sure and safe. The stock is worthless.’

“‘Do you mean that you used the money in the bank to speculate with?’

“‘Yes, mother.’ He said the words in a whisper, and never lifted his eyes as he spoke.

“‘Is there no hope?’ she asked. ‘Can we not sell everything?’

“‘Mother,’ answered Dick, ‘hope has led me on and on, and this morning I got news which leaves me ruined every way. There is a meeting of the directors in a day or two, and then all must be told. I can hide the facts no longer.’”

“Aunt Loida, what did you say?”

“I did not speak. His mother stood up and answered: ‘Then, Dick, *you* must tell them. You shall not run away. I would keep you a prisoner myself, rather than let you do such a cowardly thing. Meet the men you have wronged face to face. Show them how and where the wrong is. Pledge them your hon—your whole estate to secure the interest of their money.

Tell them you are going to this new land of gold just discovered in America, to make the principal.' ”

“ Was that California, aunt ? ”

“ Yes, my dear. People were then rushing there from all parts of the world ; and Dick's mother told him he must also go and try to retrieve his fortune. ‘ If you will not do as I tell you, Dick,’ she said, ‘ why, then, run away like a rascal and a coward, and forget you ever had a mother.’ She asked me if that was not the right thing to do, and I could just whisper ‘ Yes.’ And I was like a woman going out of the sunshine into a vault, and all the world was a sudden black void, and life felt as if it could not be borne.”

“ Aunt, it was worse for you than it is for me ! ”

“ I think it was, dear. I felt then that no other woman had ever met with such shame and grief.”

“ What did Dick do ? ”

“ Everything his mother advised. He saw the people he had wronged and made the best arrangements possible. They were not hard with him : far from it. One old squire, who had been his father's friend, cried for very grief, and blamed himself for not advising Dick better. He even offered to lend Dick money. But Dick had to go away, Francesca. It is ten years since. I was twenty then ; I am thirty now.”

“ But you hear from him ? ”

“ His mother does. Before he left I gave him back our betrothal ring. I told him when he brought it to me again with clean hands, I would marry him. He will come some day. I am waiting for him.”

“ How long you have suffered ! Did he go to California ? ”

"No. He met on the voyage out a young man who was going to some Mexican mines as superintendent of engineers. He strongly advised Dick not to go to California. He said he was unfit for a struggle with the preponderating population, and he offered Dick a good position. The certainty seemed best, and doubtless was best for Dick. He has sent home every year varying sums of money, sometimes a great deal, sometimes not so much. But the debt is very near clear. We think he is now blockade running, for no letter has come for nearly nine months. He spoke of this change in his last letter, and there are no post-offices at sea."

"When you go away every year, is it Dick's mother you go to see?"

"Yes. And she writes to me whenever there is any news. I do not let myself fret or fear. I get up every morning wondering 'if Dick will come that day'; and I go to bed every night saying: 'Well, then, perhaps to-morrow! Perhaps to-morrow!'"

"It is hard to be a woman, Loida."

"It is. No wonder tragedies are made from us."

"Were you always patient and hopeful, Loida?"

"No; I was not. I nearly died of grief. It was a living death at first. Wisdom never comes at the beginning of a sorrow. It is the late fruit, after the tempest and wind and frost of calamity."

"When Dick comes home, can your love ever be the same?"

"No. I do not hope for the impossible. We have both outgrown love's first rapture. I know that, for, a little while ago, I opened a volume of Moore's poetry that we used to read together and think the most won-

derful poetry that ever was written. I think it now extremely silly, and yet—and yet, when alone at the close of a year, I wonder—

“ ‘ Is the nightingale singing there *yet* ?
Are the roses *still* sweet by the calm Bendemeer ? ’

But I know nothing will bring back the glory of those days before I knew what sorrow and sorrowful love meant. Neither, Francesca, do I wish them brought back. Nothing you have to go back for is worth having.”

“ You still love Dick ? ”

“ He is the *one thought* that runs through all my days.”

At this point the squire entered. He was rosy and damp, and had the breath of the chill rain about him. For the wind had changed, and it was growing very cold. He walked to the fire at once, and stirred it vigorously.

“ My word ! ” he said. “ Women will talk, if they freeze.”

He assumed a pleasant little bluster, and pretended to be colder and damper than he was, for he wished to put out of mind all memories of the conversation which had sent him into the storm.

“ They are doing well enough at the stable,” he said to Loida, “ so I went over to Asquith’s about some timber. He does beat everything for an ill-thinking man.”

“ Does he not live in that lonely house by the Chime-of-Bells Inn ? ”

“ Yes. He hath a fierce dog to give you welcome, and a currish voice to confirm it, and the way out of his

place is open always. His dog and he are the only good fellows in the world, he says, and—my word!—we should be a poor lot if they were the best.”

“I heard his dog took a prize in the London dog show.”

“That is true. He wanted me to send my dog Sultan to the show, also.”

“Why did you not do so? Sultan is far beyond Asquith’s dog.”

“Loida, I am astonished at thee. Send Sultan to a dog show! Dogs have feelings, and a decent dog does not like being looked at by a lot of people he does not know anything about. I put it to myself. I said: ‘Rashleigh Atherton, how would you like to be exhibited in a man show?’ Sultan has very gentlemanly feelings.”

“About a dog there is a great mystery.”

“To be sure there is. Sultan has a good deal of humanity in him; and of a noble kind, too. When he walks out with ladies, he treats them as if he were *preux chevalier*; and at such times he never notices any other dog. But when he walks out with me, he likes to put on airs and have a fight. He has thrashed all the dogs for miles round, and he is fair melancholy for some new ones to come into the neighborhood;”—then he looked round, and saw that Francesca had left the room, and he stooped forward and said softly: “The poor little one! Is she in very deep trouble, Loida?”

“Yes, brother—but she will conquer it. We all have to do so, in a fashion.”

Then a servant entered with candles and the tea service, and the squire began to speak of Asquith’s dog.

So the little domestic play of talking of one thing and thinking of another went on its usual uninteresting, desultory way. The servants were not deceived by the conversation. They had already decided that "something had gone wrong between Miss Atherton and Mr. Leigh "

CHAPTER X.

AT LAST GOD BRINGS THE TARDY BLESSING

“ Who know themselves and know the way before them,
And from among them choose considerately,
With clear foresight, not a blindfold courage;
And having chosen, with a steadfast mind
Pursue their purposes.”

“ God hath brought the tardy blessing
Round her at the last.”

LANCELOT did not find it as easy to escape from his sorrowful dilemma as he expected. The death of his father and his own serious resolve to take nothing from an estate fallen too early into his power made the carrying out of his cotton plan difficult, and, to himself, undesirable. He had not either the cash or credit to personally back the scheme. And he had resolved to remain away from England some years. Indeed, as soon as commercial circumstances made such a sale possible, he intended to sell his own mill at Atherton, and with the proceeds pursue fortune in some other land.

The resignation of his cotton scheme also left the world open to him. Mexico had then no special claim on his fancy or interest. On the contrary, India, Canada, Australia presented far more natural opportunities. He did not, however, speak of any such change of determination. The world around him had already accepted the necessity for cotton as an excuse sufficient for desert-

ing his home and apparent interests, and it seemed best to allow it this resolution of whatever was strange in his conduct.

He had never before supposed it would be difficult to obtain two thousand pounds, but it was several weeks ere his lawyer managed to effect this loan upon his Ather-ton mill. During these weeks he kept himself in great seclusion. To his mother he spoke very little. She had accepted without dispute the charge Lancelot threw upon her respecting the property, and her first step was to send for the overlooker, and in Lancelot's and her own name close the Garsby Mill. Then she immediately hired more servants, and began a systematic and thorough cultivation of every inch of Leigh Farm.

"Wheat and fodder will be wanted as long as the world lasts," she said; "and if folks stick to the land, the land will feed them, and happen make money for them."

Lancelot opposed nothing and indorsed nothing, and when she found all efforts at conciliation and co-operation unresponded to, she hid herself entirely behind a countenance cold, impassive, and expressionless. Lancelot sat at meat with her; they had nothing else in common. The youth wandered alone among the thickly shaded walks in the garden, or he sat musing in his dismantled rooms. He could not read; every subject but Francesca slipped away from his consciousness; and the sound of his piano would have shocked and offended him. Francesca supplied all the springs of his mind; her sweetness; her beauty; her confiding love; her piteous loss; he went over and over this ground, and only varied it by still sadder reflections on his father's

death, his mother's painful condition, the national distress, their loss of money, the closing of both mills, and the absolute necessity for his own expatriation.

He was thinking somberly of the latter circumstance one morning, when his mother entered his room. She had an air of business about her, the alert manner of a person on whom there are great and grave charges. Advancing to Lancelot, she cast a letter down upon the table, and said:

"There, then! That came half an hour since. Some woman scribbling to thee, I see. If I was thee, I would try and find something else to do with life, than to sit still and dream it away."

He took the letter with a "Thank you, mother."

"Nay, thou needn't thank me. It hes the Atherton postmark on it, and—" then he looked anxiously at the letter and saw it was Miss Loida's writing. Immediately he was sure that Francesca was ill. A swoon of fearful thoughts turned him sick and faint.

"Mother," he said, "will you leave me now? I—I want to read my letter. I am terrified."

"About Miss Atherton? To be sure. Thy mother is to go away that thou may read about her and hev thy love-feast all to thysen. Does ta think I'll stay where I am not wanted? Not I. Mebbe it will come into thy mind, either to live like a Christian in thy home, or to get out of a place not good enough for thee, as soon as iver ta can."

"I will, mother."

Then she left the room with an air of indifference, but her heart was burning within her. She was truly angry at Lancelot, but far more angry at herself. Her blame

of him was from the lips only; she accused herself continually with her very soul, in words she durst not utter, in tears she would not shed.

When the door was closed, Lancelot opened his letter. He was sure it contained ill news, and it was after all only a friendly note of advice. And yet, it was the determining note of his future:

“*Dear Sir:*” Miss Loida wrote. “I hear that you are going to Mexico. It is sad to be in a strange country without a friend. I have a dear friend who has been at the San Lepato mines for ten years. I think he may be there yet. If not, he is at some Mexican seaport in the blockade business. His name is Richard Alderson; and if you show him this letter, he will, for my sake, be a friend to you. And he will soon love you for your own sake. I have written this out of my own wish and desire to do you good. Francesca loves you continually with all her heart, and I am your sincere friend,

LOIDA VYNER.”

In the wavering condition of his mind, this letter was like an anchor to Lancelot. He took it for a sign, and accepted at once the destiny it should lead him to. For it appeared strange that two circumstances so different as the need of cotton and Miss Loida’s desire to help him should both point out this same country to him. Surely there was some higher indication than mere chance in such a double leading.

Miss Loida’s letter was followed by one announcing the success of his lawyer regarding the two thousand pounds he wanted; and now the gate was opened, and the road cleared for his journey. His preparations were otherwise perfect; he had only to bid “farewell” to his mother, and write his last letter to Francesca. Martha Leigh knew well that this point had been reached;

but, suffer as she might, she would die ere she would show the knowledge affected her.

Though not a word had been said on the subject, she was aware, on the morning of Lancelot's departure, that they were to eat their last breakfast together. A tenderness she neither admitted nor denied led her to set the table with unusual care, and to make the dishes her son liked best. She was drawing her eyelids tight together, and setting her lips firm, the whole time her hands and feet were busy. It was bitter hard work to keep back the tears, bitter hard work to keep back the long, moaning cries that burst from her heart, and almost choked her in their impetuous rush to her lips.

But she made no sign—the woman in her would have escaped into the outer space rather than do so—no sign, unless her specially neat attire and the rigid bordering of the gray-white muslin of her widow's cap might be so taken. And perhaps Martha Leigh had a distinct though dim intention of this kind in her dress; perhaps she did wish Lancelot's last mental picture of his mother to be one he could remember with respect. At any rate, something of this result was obtained; for Lancelot carried with him wherever he went this memory of a tall, grave, handsome woman in a black gown, her bosom crossed by white lawn, her gray hair covered with that formal, desolate-looking head-gear.

When they rose from the breakfast-table, Lancelot glanced at the doors. They were shut. He then looked steadily into his mother's face, and her lips quivered, and she forced herself to look away from him. He lifted both her hands and held them a moment. She still gazed outward and remained speechless. He

dropped her hands and took her to his breast. He kissed her repeatedly, and murmured repeatedly :

“God help you, mother! God help you, mother! I shall never forget you. Mother! Mother!”

Then she broke utterly down. Lancelot had led her to her chair, and was going away. She laid her head backward, and a great mother-cry escaped her lips :

“My lad! My dear lad! Do not leave me! Do not leave me!”

But he was gone. She heard the outer door shut. She heard his quick footsteps on the gravel. She felt as if her heart was torn in two; felt all the physical agony of the soul-parting. It was worse than death. Her women, coming to look for her an hour afterward, found her sitting like a stone in her chair, upright by sheer force of will, conscious by sheer force of will, white as a corpse, and with a look in her eyes as if tears had turned to stone in them.

“You be sick, mistress?” said one woman, touching her almost with fear.

Then she made an effort to speak—a supreme effort—which only succeeded in dragging from the prostrate soul a few words, disconnected and hardly articulate :

“No—my son—gone!”

They carried her to a couch and gave her brandy and began to softly chafe her hands and feet, and so a dead sleep fell upon the wretched woman and she forgot for a little time her misery and her despair—or, at least, flesh and blood were at rest, but the soul has potentialities of suffering no sleep dulls. Who has not suffered in the mysterious travel of dreams agonies of which their waking bodies were incapable? Vague terrors of

nameless things; sense of loss irreparable; visions that would blind their mortal eyes; yea, and also consolations ineffable, inconceivable, unspeakable.

Martha Leigh slept, but her soul waked, and when, after hours of apparent oblivion, she rose up with a great sigh and feebly walked across the room to her own chair, she was a much older woman. Whatever experiences she had had in her sleep, they had not been void or misunderstood. She came back to life like a woman chidden by Mighty Powers. For it is truly in the night season, when deep sleep falleth upon man, that God punishes and admonishes. It is—

“ . . . In quiet silence, when the night is in the midst of her swift course, the Almighty Word leaps down from heaven, and suddenly visions of terrible dreams trouble the wicked sore, and terrors come upon them unlooked for . . . lest they should perish, and not know why they were afflicted.” *

Martha Leigh knew at that hour why she was afflicted, but, alas! knowledge is not penitence. Weary and suffering, she was also resentful. Too weak and confused yet to argue out her own case, she felt sure of its justice; and if she deferred to a fitter time her plea, it was because she was confident of making it then stronger and juster.

The great fact remained, however, in spite of all pleas—Lancelot was gone. But she positively refused to think of him as gone for any great length of time. He would be back in a few months. That girl at Atherton Court—if all other considerations failed—would bring him home again.

* *Wisdom of Solomon*, xviii. 14-19.

In the meantime Lancelot was nearing Liverpool. The bark he was to sail in was nearly ready for sea; he had only to make a few purchases and write farewell to Francesca. He delayed this letter until the last hour. He had granted himself this privilege—not to give her up while he remained in England. As he went to the ship, he posted the letter. A middle-aged woman noticed the handsome youth drop it into the irrevocable box, and she pitied the look of misery with which he walked away. She comprehended his despair, and said a soft “God help the lad!” as he passed out of her sight. Lancelot would have been comforted by her prayer and pity, had he known it; but it is one of the misfortunes of existence that society compels us to restrain sympathy unless we have a bond and right to offer it. Every one is thus poorer by many a kindly wish and many an honest prayer.

Driven like a blind man before his sorrowful destiny, Lancelot reached the ship and crossed the narrow plank, and felt himself already adrift from every hope and joy that had made his youth so blessed; and he could not avoid a passion of regret for those past years that would never return. Amid falling shades and a wind like the Banshee they were driven down the Mersey. The thick-coated murmur of the river blending with the great complaining of the distant sea came through the darkness, and the hoarse, melancholy voices of the sailors went with it. He was utterly wretched and hopeless, bruised in heart and brain, but an act so vulgar and cowardly as suicide never occurred to him. The vestal fires of conscience, of pure love, of honor and integrity still burned within him.

Sitting alone on the edge of his rough berth he told himself that, even if his life should be a tragedy of never-fulfilled desires and vain strivings, and of final suffering and death, he could at least make it a noble tragedy—a tragedy fit for the angel “cloud of witnesses” to contemplate. So, though he knew it not, he was receiving the grandest education of which humanity is capable—the education that comes by reverence and by sorrow; for these are the teachers greater than Gamaliel, and blessed are they who can sit at their feet.

It is always impossible to say how far the change in one life may affect other lives. Lancelot’s voluntary expatriation was the cause of unforeseen and very important changes in the hitherto placid routine of Ather-ton Court. The squire had been dallying with an intention to enter Parliament, and Francesca’s despondency after her receipt of Lancelot’s farewell letter made him decide in favor of such a course. His own influence and that of a neighboring earl were sufficient to insure his election without any great expense or trouble, and he was possessed by the usual idea that love could be cured by a change of scene and a gay social life.

But when he proposed to rent a house in London and take Miss Vyner and Francesca there for the season, he found that he had at least reckoned without his household. Miss Vyner—who was daily feeling more sure of Dick Alderson’s return—very calmly but very resolutely declined the London season; and Francesca was still more positive in her determination to remain at home. She declared herself “too sick to go into society; all she wished was to be still and not to talk.”

So the squire, with all his own unacknowledged reluc-

tance to political and social life, was compelled to enter it alone. Francesca made a sad little joke of his scheme and its failure :

“ You planned so many engagements for Loida and me, dear father, and now you will have them to fulfil yourself. Loida, will you fancy Squire Atherton in a court costume, or wearing his militia uniform, or a black swallow-tail dress-coat ? ”

And the squire answered :

“ I shall wear my own fashions, Francesca—thou may be sure of that ; ” and there was some faint merriment about it all, but in the end the squire went alone and very sadly to London and to Parliament.

But as it often happens, the lonely man was quickly introduced to some charming people, and then he became quite enamored of social pleasures. Every letter received at Atherton was a gayer one. Lords and ladies, great men and beautiful women, flitted across the pages ; and there was specially frequent mention made of a Mrs. Mott, an American lady of wealth and fashion.

Loida began to ponder this circumstance. She said nothing to Francesca ; for Francesca was too much absorbed in her own love affair to imagine any other possible. Yet Loida thought it possible. The squire was a very handsome man, in the prime of life. His rusticity had imparted an idea of years which did not belong to him. She could imagine him fashionably dressed and exceedingly attractive ; for his simple, straightforward, courteous nature could hardly fail to be delightful, because it was so perfectly natural.

Yet, in spite of the squire's gay letters, the winter at Atherton Court went past very dully. The hunting and

the hunt dinners and balls had hitherto broken the monotony of its winter life. The ladies had supposed these breaks would not be missed, but Loida missed them. She admitted to herself that the winter was long, very long and weary. She wished often that her brother-in-law had never gone to London; she had a presentiment that change had only begun, and she could not help asking wistfully: "Where will it end?"

At last, at last, the spring came! Everything is possible in spring-time. When the tulips and jonquils pushed their bright leaves through the brown earth, Loida began to watch, to listen, to dress herself for the hope in her heart. And how sweet a thing is hope! We may acknowledge that Hope is the brother of Fear, and only the merrier fool of the two; but it is at least good to have the company of the merry one. Even Francesca lifted her drooping head a little, and suffered the sunshine to fall upon her white face. She had not heard a word of Lancelot, and Loida had not heard a word of Dick, but when the swallows came back from over the sea, it seemed natural to hope that some message would follow them. Francesca often looked longingly at their swift, scythe-like wings, and said to her heart: "Oh, that I had wings like a swallow, then I would fly away and search the whole world over for Lancelot!"

Never had the Court looked fairer than it did that Maytime. The clematis arbor was darkly green, and the scent of a hundred flowers and herbs was in the air. There were birds building everywhere; the men were whistling in the fields, the women singing through the house as they threw open the long-closed casements and hung the rooms with snowy draperies.

But May is not all sunshine and flowers; one morning, about the middle of the month, it was very chilly and raining heavily. The ladies came late downstairs, and they eat their breakfast without much conversation. The drip of the rain was monotonous and mournful. The "chirp," "chirp" of the birds had a fretful, put-out-of-the-way sound. There was no mail but a letter from the squire to Miss Loida; a very long letter, from which there fell some architectural plan. Francesca glanced at it with a little curiosity, and Miss Loida answered the glance:

"It is a plan for an orchid-house," she said.

"Whatever can father want with an orchid-house?"

"I will read his letter, and then we shall understand."

The letter, however, did not appear to be satisfactory. Miss Loida turned it over and backward, and was certainly much embarrassed, and Francesca, with some impatience, asked:

"What is it all about, Aunt Loida?"

"My dear—I hardly know what to say to you. Do you recollect how much your father has written lately about Mrs. Mott, the American lady, who is so much admired in London?"

"Yes. Is she coming here?"

"I think she is coming here."

"How dreadful! I cannot bear the thought of visitors. I hope she will not stay long."

"I am sure, my dear—I do not know how to tell you, Francesca—your father has married her."

"My father! Married! Loida, that is impossible!"

"It is true. He says Mrs. Mott preferred a quiet wedding. They are gone to Paris for a few weeks.

She wants the orchid-house built, and your father has written to a man in Drayton to come here and attend to the building of it. He will probably be here to-day."

"How cruel! How wrong of father!"

"No, my dear. Your father has as much right to marry as you have. If you had loved him alone, he would have been faithful to you, no doubt."

"How could I help loving Lancelot?"

"Perhaps your father could not help loving this charming American. Francesca, you have yourself to blame. You fret so continually about Lancelot that it appeared necessary for your health and life to do something. Your father went to Parliament, hoping to take you with him to London. You would neither be happy at home nor yet go with him to London. My dear, the best of men, the tenderest of fathers, grow weary of sorrow that will not be comforted."

"Father is an old man. The idea of him marrying!"

"He is a very handsome man, in the prime of life. The idea of his marriage is not more absurd than the idea of your marriage."

"Aunt Loida, how can old people be in love?"

"They love better, they love less selfishly, they love more wisely than the very young love. And all people over twenty years of age are not old. I have no doubt your father has made a wise choice; no doubt whatever that Mrs. Atherton is a charming, lovable woman; and if I were you, Francesca, I should meet her on that presumption. Of course, there must be other changes. That is always the case, for one change brings another. I shall now leave this house, and go to my own house."

"Aunt Loida, if you leave, I shall leave also. Let me go with you."

"Your movements must depend upon your father's will, Francesca. Do you remember what a little fret I had the other day, because my house was not rented this year? You see now that it is a fortunate thing. I can go directly to it."

"May I not live with you?"

"Such a step would look like deserting your father, and it would surely prejudice all the country-side against your stepmother. But you can make me long visits."

"Things go very hard with me, Loida. If Lancelot were only here, I should not care."

"You condemn yourself, and excuse your father's marriage—if it needs excuse—by that very remark. You mean that if Lancelot were here you would be indifferent as to whether your father married or not?"

"Suppose I do mean that?"

"If you care more for Lancelot than for your father, then why should not your father care more for Mrs. Mott than for you? Let us be fair, Francesca."

"Father has treated you badly, also, Loida."

"No, he has not. Your father knew that as soon as Dick Alderson came home, I should marry Dick and leave him. Love asks its equivalent. No love abides that is on one side only. Come, my dear, do not fret. Let us go to my room and consider things calmly and kindly. There are some preparations to make for the bride."

"I will not talk about any bride. I wish I knew where Lancelot was."

At this moment a servant entered the room and said:

"There is a person to see you, Miss Vyner. I put him in Squire Atherton's office."

"Who is it, Sarah?"

"I have never seen the person before, miss."

"He can come in here, Francesca, can he not?"

"No, he cannot, Loida. I have a bad headache, and he will be talking about glass and measurements and steam heat, and such things, until I am half crazy."

"To be sure, it is the man from Drayton. I had forgotten. It is the orchid-house, of course. Sarah, tell him I will see him in a few minutes."

She talked a little longer with Francesca, and then, with the "plan" and the letter of directions in her hand, went to see the builder and discuss the arrangements with him. She was much depressed, in spite of the calm, reasonable way in which she had taken the news of the squire's marriage. The idea of a total change of life was not pleasant to Loida. Her heart fell fathoms deep after she had left Francesca, and she slowly walked through the long and somewhat intricate passages leading to the squire's office. The Court had become home to her. She dreaded the idea of making another home. And she had grown a little despairing about Dick. She would not acknowledge the feeling, but it was there; and somehow this discussion with a stranger about a fancy of the new mistress pained her. She could not help feeling that Rashleigh Atherton had been a little selfish for his bride. She controlled herself better than Francesca, but the thoughts of both women were equally bitter.

Loida was always reserved, and her manner with social inferiors had distinctly an air of pride. She en-

tered the office quite conscious of this feeling, accentuated by a sense that the discussion was disagreeable to her. There was a large painting in oils of the squire in hunting costume over the chimney-piece, and the man stood on the hearth looking up at it. His back was to the door, but he turned quickly as Loida entered. She looked at him. Then she uttered a shrill cry—a cry of joy, of delight, of amazement:

"Dick! Dick! O Dick! Dick! Home at last!"

With the words on her lips, she reached his arms. She could not have told how; she only knew she was there, and that the knowledge filled her being with a delicious content. The fruit so hardly tended for ten years was ripe—was on their lips, and all its sweetness realized. For some moments there were no questions and no explanations. It was joy sufficient to be together again. No doubt of Dick's worthiness troubled the meeting. He took from his pocket a ring, made like a forget-me-not. The flower was the ornament; its golden stem was turned into a circle for the finger.

"I have worn it over my heart for ten years, Loida," he said. "Will you take it from me again, dearest?"

"Dick, forgive me for ever removing it. Let me have it once more, love, and not even in death will I resign it."

"I have won the right to re-offer it, Loida. The task is finished. I have brought with me money sufficient to pay the uttermost farthing, and a little over, dear, for our own use. I have sent word to every one I owe to meet me in the bank parlor in ten days. After that meeting, Loida, need we wait longer?"

With the sweetest frankness she surrendered all to his

will. And they talked of the glad future in that confused, hurried way which is natural to those who love and meet after a long absence. There was so much to tell, nothing could be told in detail. Their whole conversation was only like a table of "contents." It named the incidents, or the expectations, or indicated the plans and hopes of the coming years; no more. So that nothing serious or final was arrived at, and the hours went by in saying little more than:

"How lovely you have grown, Loida!"

"How handsome and brave-looking you are, Dick!"

"How happy we are!"

"How good it is to live!"

"How good to do right!"

All Dick's adventures, and what he had seen, and what he had done, and the money he had saved, and the love and gratitude in his heart, and the ways of the future—all these things were but touched with a question. Was there not all their lives long to talk about them?

Finally, Loida remembered Francesca, and they went to find her. She had gone upstairs; she was weeping bitterly.

"She wished now she had never seen Lancelot! What trouble there had been since he came that day to Atherton! What changes were following him! He had set a door open, and so many sorrows had come through it. Oh, if she had only been a poor girl, Lancelot would have taken her with him!" And then she cried out, with a fresh bitterness: "Father also is deserting me! He promised to find out where Lancelot had gone, and he has not done so. He can think of orchid-

houses, and of getting married; he can think so much for his new wife that he forgets his poor little daughter, though her heart is breaking!"

In her passionate complaining she did not even notice the joy in her aunt's face and manner. Her own sorrow so engrossed her perceptions that she had no intelligence for another's happiness, and no sympathy with it. Loida felt chilled by this selfish absorption, and she said, with some decision:

"Francesca, you are very unjust to every one. Are you the only woman that has ever suffered? You know well that your father did everything possible to redeem his promise to you. He wrote to Lancelot's mother, and he got what answer back? '*Thou knows as much as I do!*' He wrote to Lancelot's lawyer, and was told that his client's destination was unknown to him; that he had been instructed, when the Atherton Mill was sold, to deposit the price of it at Ball Moser's bank, Liverpool. Then he wrote to the bank, and was told that the name of Lancelot Leigh was not on any of their books. What more could he do?"

"If this Mrs. Mott had disappeared, he would likely have found out something else to do."

"Francesca, do you not see that something has made me very, very happy?"

Then the girl lifted her head from the pillow and looked at her aunt.

"Why, Loida!" she cried. "What has happened? Has Lancelot come?" And she leaped to her feet and her face was transfigured with joy and hope.

"Dick has come! Only Dick."

"Oh, dear! Oh, Aunt Loida, how could you startle

and disappoint me so cruelly? I thought it was Lancelot. Forgive me, aunt, I am disgracefully selfish. I am a bad girl. I cannot feel happy with you. You ought to hate me."

"My darling, I pity you most truly. I know how you feel. I have felt something like it, often, only I managed not to show it. Come and see Dick. Come, it will do you good."

"Has he seen Lancelot?"

"No."

"Yet you wrote and told Lancelot to go to the mines where Dick was."

"Dick had left them a year ago."

"Oh, why? Why did he leave them? Everything goes against Lancelot."

"Come down and see Dick. It will do you good."

"I would rather not, Aunt Loida. I am so miserable, I should spoil your pleasure. But, indeed, I am glad Dick has come. I look selfish, but I do not feel so. Leave me alone a little; I will try and come to you in an hour or two."

After all, is there any of the apostolic precepts harder than that which bids us "rejoice with them that do rejoice"? The joy, the fame, the wealth that is not ours offends. To weep with those that weep, to play patron and comforter—these are offices highly congenial to the most selfish. But the gracious benignity which can rejoice with those who do rejoice, which can praise the worthy without a secret hatred, and respect the honestly wealthy without a cleaving envy, is a much rarer virtue; and only those possess it who are the beloved of God—men and women after God's own heart.

Loida felt hurt and depressed by the want of Francesca's sympathy, and yet the suffering girl was not entirely to blame. She was enduring that most absorbing and distracting form of sorrow—a grief that was not sure, that was doubled by its mystery and its hopelessness. If Lancelot had dared to make her know the whole truth, she would doubtless have borne it as bravely as himself. But to be told by a piece of paper that they must part forever; to be told she must forget her lover, and no reason for forgetfulness given; to be left without any personal farewell; to be left in absolute ignorance of his destination, without any promise for the future—was a situation devoid of comfort, unless she could find in pride or in anger the strength to confront it. Francesca had no pride where Lancelot was concerned, and to be angry with him long was for her impossible.

Nor was she indifferent to the coming of a new mistress to Atherton Court. Hitherto she had been the power behind all other powers. Her will had been law, she had been virtually the lady of the manor. There was another power coming now; a power that had an evil reputation. To lose her lover was one kind of trouble; to get a stepmother was another kind. She felt as if her father was already a stepfather. As soon as she was silent and sorrowful, as soon as she made the house dull, he had gone away and found another to amuse and comfort him. That was the way she looked at the squire's action, and, of course, if she was right, the squire was wrong.

Toward evening she went downstairs and saw Dick, and Dick pleased her very much. He talked with her

about Lancelot and offered to write to the mines and see if he was there. He promised to inclose a letter which Francesca would write. He assured her that, if Lancelot had reached the mines, General Blas, who was now the superintendent, would find him out and deliver her letter. He told her that it was utterly impossible for Lancelot to forget her; he knew, he said, by his own experience. Lancelot would be compelled to return and see her—or die.

And love believes whatever love wants to believe. Dick was so sympathetic, so hopeful, so sorry for Francesca, that she found herself talking freely before him. He entered into her grief; he put it into such expressive words; he saw so many ways out of it. No one had ever comforted her as Dick did. For this was the man's nature, his gift, his power, the attribute which had made him prosperous. He was a son of consolation.

"And he is really quite handsome, Loida," said Francesca, as they sat alone, talking, that night. "He has a fine figure, too, and such gentle ways. But what a pity you did not know he was coming. You have not been so unbecomingly dressed for a long time as you were this morning, Loida. And then, to think he was a man to build an orchid-house! When one waits ten years for a lover, it would be nice to have a more romantic meeting."

All this was very true, and Loida could not avoid a sigh at the contradiction of small events. Every other morning, for a long time, she had put on some pretty chintz or muslin gown. That morning it had been so dark and wet, and she had felt so despairing, "what was the good of it?" And though she had imagined Dick's

return in many a different way, it had never entered her mind to suppose he might come to the house as some person on business, and she go to meet him, feeling a little cross at the obligation, and consciously assuming the manner which, least of all, she would knowingly have met her long-absent lover with. All her ideal plans and expectations had been made vain by blunt reality. She had looked entirely different to what she had intended to look. She had worn the least pretty of all her dresses; she had been almost embarrassed in her welcome; indeed, she had repeated over and over the same words. Fate is full of such contradictions. One would think she loved to dash the cup of joy she could not longer delay. So Loida sighed and was a little sorry for her own disappointment, though she said:

“If the heart be true and good, does the body matter?”

“Yes, I think it does, aunt. I remember the moment I first saw Lancelot coming up the terrace-steps, singing, in the sunshine. His bare head and handsome face, his fine figure, his air of happiness, and his voice, like a voice out of heaven, took all my senses captive. If he had been little and ugly and badly dressed, and had had a disagreeable voice, do you think I should have fallen in love with his good heart? I am afraid not. And do you think my father would have cared for Mrs. Mott’s cleverness and good temper, if she had not been, in his opinion, ‘the prettiest, brightest little woman in the whole world’?”

“And do you not think, Francesca, that it will be a great thing to have ‘the prettiest, brightest woman in the whole world’ at Atherton Court?”

"It is so easy for you to ask that question now, Loida. You are not going to live at Atherton Court."

"That is true. When your father comes home, I shall go to Alderson Bars to live."

"So 'the prettiest and brightest' will not put you in the shade. You will not have a stepmother at Alderson Bars."

"Francesca, I shall have a mother-in-law."

"But suppose—"

"My darling, we will 'suppose' no more to-night. We ought to be asleep."

"I cannot sleep. I shall go on 'supposing.'"

"Then," said Loida, as she stood, smiling, at Francesca's door, "here is a problem for your suppositions:

" 'Supposing I were you;
Supposing you were me;
Supposing each were somebody else,
I wonder who we should be? ' "

CHAPTER XI.

FORTUNATE GOLD AND SORROWFUL LOVE.

“Clear shining after rain.”

“Love that left me with a wound.”

THE north of England was at this time like the prophet's roll—written within and without with desolations and mourning and woe. The total dearth of cotton, the closing of the great Lancashire and Yorkshire factories, the consequent idleness of an immense population fit for no other kind of work, the famine and nakedness and pestilence which no private nor yet national charity could far assuage, made a terrible total of sectional misery.

But there was, at least, a speedy hope of peace. Dick was sure that a few months—a year at the utmost—must finally cripple the Rebellion. There would be a superabundance of cotton; then the great chimneys would smoke once more, and the noise of the spinning-loom make again that giant “hum” of labor, which would be a song of rejoicing to the thousands ready to perish.

The squire was not at this time seriously troubled about these matters. He was traveling on the continent with his bride, and the bright, bewitching Mrs. Atherton made items for the newspapers in whatever capital they happened to be visiting. In the meantime

changes were in progress at Atherton Court, which would bring still greater changes. The most evident was, of course, Dick's return. This return implied many things, the first of which was the settlement with his creditors.

The day before the one appointed for this purpose, Loida and Francesca went to Alderson Bars—Francesca a little reluctantly. She could not feel the interest she wished to feel, and would have been glad to remain at Atherton alone, to brood over her sorrow. But Loida was anxious to show her both Alderson Bars and Vyner Hall. It was not yet certain which place was to be the future home of Dick and herself. Loida, with a beautiful generosity, insisted on their living with Dick's mother. She told Dick it would be cruel to go away from her. No other woman had so much deserved the joy of his constant presence.

But Mrs. Alderson had an equal generosity. She insisted on the young people going to Vyner Hall. She pointed out the fact that the two places were only a short distance from each other. She was sure they would be happier in their own home. She was good enough to pretend that she also would be happier to be alone in her home. It was a contest of generous feeling, and it was at least likely that age would be the most persistent in its self-denial.

Francesca was charmed with both places. Vyner was a much smaller place than Alderson, but its grounds had been made very beautiful by Loida's father, its possibilities were great, and it would not require many servants to keep it in order. It was a happy day at Alderson Bars when Dick once more crossed its threshold,

holding Loida's hand. All the sorrows and labors of ten years vanished in that tread. They looked into each other's eyes and were satisfied. Francesca also exerted herself to add to the general contentment, and the evening was a very joyous one.

But the greatest joy of it came when Francesca had retired, and the three loving bearers and toilers for honor's sake could sit down together and discuss the eventful meeting of the next day. The call for this meeting had created a sensation throughout the countryside. When Dick had made the promise to his creditors ten years previously, there had been in his few resolute words something which inspired belief; and the Yorkshire farmers of that day did not readily give up an impression. If any of them had ever doubted Dick's assurance, they now positively denied the doubt. One and all said they had been "as easy in their minds as could be; and things hed happened so, as showed they were about right."

It was, then, a pleasant crowd that gathered in the old bank. The building stood in the main street of Tiphram Market, a plain, low house of two stories, the windows of the lower one being covered with dust and cobwebs. The upper rooms were inhabited by an old clerk who had been connected with the bank from his boyhood. Everything relating to its affairs were in John Stead's head and hands. He knew its indebtedness to a farthing. He had paid out for Mrs. Alderson every shilling of interest. The books of the bank were the pride of his life; he could show them balanced to date, on demand, at any time.

To this old man and his wife and their middle-aged

sons and daughters the "clearing up" of Alderson's bank was an affair that stirred their little world to its center. John Stead had a new suit of black broadcloth made for the occasion; and Mrs. Stead and her two daughters, having cleaned their rooms to a point of shining perfection, put on their best dresses and sat down in the parlor as if it was Sunday.

They were unexpectedly rewarded. Not only did Dick Alderson come upstairs—they expected so much of Dick—but Dick brought with him his mother and Miss Vyner. It was the first time the ladies had ever been in the bank rooms, and the Steads congratulated themselves ever afterward on their forethought in having them in such exquisite order. For in spite of their pre-occupation with Dick's affairs, both ladies perceived where praise would be delightful, and both gave it without stint.

Yet they were listening with all their souls, the while they talked of the most commonplace matters—listening for Dick's voice, for he had promised to call them at a certain point of the proceedings. They could hear the murmur of voices, the opening and shutting of doors, the vague stir more apprehended than real, which is never absent where there is a number of human beings together.

Depositors of small amounts had been paid off long, long ago; it was only those to whom the bank owed large sums who were to be satisfied that day. About sixty men were present, and it seemed to Loida that it took a very long time to give each man a check which was already made out. But as she was impatiently listening to an account of Miss Margaret Stead's attack

of ague, there was a sudden sense of movement, and then a loud and oft-repeated cheer, and Mrs. Alderson rose up nervously and looked at Loida, and Loida hastened to her side, and the ladies went downstairs together. They saw Dick at the foot of them, and Loida called to him: "We are coming, Dick;" and in a few moments they entered the bank with him.

The company were all standing. Some had checks in their hands, others were buckling them up in their capacious pocket-books. Such a crowd of large, rosy, pleased-looking men! It gave a sense of new life to go among them. They were all talking, and all talking together. Hearty laughs emphasized their words. They had all been partakers in a deed which made them think well of their kind, and they were as happy, and as satisfied with themselves, as if they had each individually been the doer of it. In one sense they had. For if Dick Alderson had worked and saved, they had trusted and waited; and they all felt that their forbearance had not only given Dick a chance, but had also strengthened the hands and heart of his mother to do her part.

When she entered the room, they gave her a ringing cheer. They crowded round, and shook her hands, and told her she had a fine son, and that they were glad to see him home again. And when she said "Gentlemen!" they hushed in a moment their noisy talk, and, hats in hands, stood still to listen to her.

She looked at them with a happy smile.

"Gentlemen! Dick has done his best to atone for his fault. I, his mother, ask you to blot it out of your memories; to give him your respect and your confi-

dence as if he had never forfeited them; to meet him at church and at market as you used to meet his father. If you cannot do this, be honest, straightforward men, and say: 'Nay, we cannot forget.' Then Dick will go away from here, and I will go with him; and we will begin life elsewhere. But, gentlemen, I can trust Dick. I can, indeed!"

"And I can trust Dick, too. I can trust him with all my happiness, with all my estate, with all the days of my life, even unto the grave. Friends, if the love of life is also the love of heaven, I can trust Dick for all eternity."

It was Loida Vyner who spoke. She looked at the gathered gentlemen, and then she turned to Dick and put her hand in his.

There was a confusion of smothered ejaculations. Men looked into their hats and fingered the Madras silk handkerchiefs which lay in them. They were all much moved, and not quick in expressing feelings of this kind. For a moment there was a painful silence, and many eyes were turned upon one old man, Squire Gerald Granby, a magistrate and a person of great social power. He was restless while Loida was speaking, and he looked steadily at the young man standing between his mother and his betrothed. Not a man to decide quickly about anything, Squire Granby, in this case, came to an instant determination.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we have the name of being honest men. Dick Alderson *has proved* he is an honest man. That is about the difference between him and us, eh?"

"To be sure! To be sure, squire!"

"In this respect, then, he has an advantage over us. We know—not by words, but by deeds—that Richard Alderson is an honest man. I will give him a hearty welcome on my heart and at my table. I will give him my vote and my friendship in the hunt and the militia, and if he chooses to open the doors of his father's and his grandfather's bank, he may put the check he has just given me down as the first deposit."

Then what a tumult there was! "Hear, hear!" cried some. "Hurrah for Granby and Alderson!" cried others. A crowd shook Dick's hands again; another crowd gathered round the generous speaker. Mrs. Alderson leaned upon her son's shoulder and cried for joy. Loida went to Squire Granby, who was an old friend of the family, and gave him both her hands, and he said:

"Thou spoke like a good woman, Loida. More good women like thee would make more good men. Tell me when thou marries Dick, and I will come and give thee away. Good girl! Good girl! God love thee, my dear!"

And so with kind wishes and kind words tumbling over each other, the happy company departed. Then the chief actors in the little drama also went homeward. The hour dreamed of, worked for, endured for, waited for, through ten long years, had been realized. Mrs. Alderson wept softly and happily, and Dick and Loida kissed her tears away. Dick was silent with his felicity. Loida, in all her life, had never been so beautiful and so lovable. Her long seclusion had given a kind of antique *bon ton* to her that was charming, and her affectionate, loyal nature imparted to her presence a living sweetness.

Into this wonderful joy Francesca could not enter.

She was glad to return to Atherton Court. There were places there in which Lancelot's personality was still strong. She could not bear to think of him in strange rooms, for in places they had never been together she could not catch the spirit of those impalpable impressions of Lancelot which remained like pictures in the air of those spots familiar to their love and their hopes.

And she did not like to trouble Loida's late joyful spring with the gloom of her own despair. Perhaps, too, Loida's spontaneous sympathy was not now as active as Francesca's needs demanded. In spite of every effort she could make, in spite of the new hopes on every side of her life, Francesca was very miserable. If she could only hear of Lancelot! If she only knew where he was! If she only knew he was well! If she only knew that he still loved her, then she could better bear to live. As it was, she hated every day, for she went weeping to sleep, and woke up sighing to think of the long hours she must face with a serene countenance and a breaking heart.

She thought that nobody now cared for her—that is, they did not care about Lancelot, or put themselves to any trouble to find out what had become of him. Her father's long absence convinced her that he had his heart and his happiness with him. It made her sad to think he could be dining and feasting and going on all kinds of pleasure-makings, and never remember her despair. And Loida was so entirely taken up with Dick and the refurnishing of Vyner Hall, and the getting ready of her new bridal garments, not to speak of the charge she kept at Atherton, that Francesca never could get a long talk with her about Lancelot. Some person or thing

always interfered. Every one was forgetting Lancelot but herself. She could feel that his very name was a bore, an intrusion, a cloud across the sunshine, a false note in the song of happiness.

So the summer sped away. The squire was expected home in September, and Loida and Dick would be married immediately afterward. All the old life at Atherton Court would then be past forever. A new mistress, with new ways, would take Loida's place, and Francesca knew that her father would, in many respects, be a different man. There would be changes of which he might not be conscious, but which would be painfully evident to her. For no one can live among strange people and under strange influences for months and remain unaltered by the circumstances.

These considerations moved her to take a desperate step.

"Loida," she said, one evening, as they sat sewing and thinking—"Loida, will you go with me to Idleholme?"

"To Idleholme! Why, Francesca, Jane is in Italy. Why do you want to go there?"

"I want to see Lancelot's mother. We could stay a day or two at Idleholme, and I would ride over to Leigh. Perhaps—perhaps I might find something out."

"I do not think that course would be quite right, Francesca."

"Yes, it would. Yes, it would. Remember, Aunt Loida, that you are going away from me. I shall be left here with a strange woman, who never saw Lancelot. Who am I to speak to? Father will not listen to me; and if he would, can I talk to him *now*? Dear Loida,

before you go, as a last kindness to me, give me this satisfaction. If my mother were alive, I am sure she would let me go. This morning I found a verse which I said weeping to her, and then the thought of going to Leigh came into my mind. It was this verse :

“ ‘ Mother, mother, up in heaven,
Stand upon the jasper sea,
And be witness I have given
All the gifts required of me.
Hope that blessed me,
Bliss that crowned,
Love that left me with a wound.’ ”

Let me go to Leigh, Aunt Loida.”

“ You shall go, dear. I will ask Dick to go with us. But could not Dick go for you ? ”

“ No. I am, sure I can do better than any one. Lancelot’s mother is a very strange woman. Dick would not know how to manage her ; but I think she will be kind to me, for Lancelot’s sake.”

“ Then we will go to Idleholme in a few days—perhaps next Monday.”

“ That is nearly a week away. I cannot, cannot wait so long, Loida. Why not go to-morrow ? Dick returns to Alderson Bars on Saturday, and he may not come back for several days. Loida, days seem whole years to me. I am so wretched that every moment is an hour.”

“ Then we will go to-morrow. Leaving at nine o’clock, we can gallop there in five hours, and Dick will be a sufficient escort.”

The decision and promptitude of Loida’s acquiescence gave some heart and hope to the sorrowing girl.

and she was almost cheerful next morning when they cantered together through the park and on to the high-road to Leigh. It was a beautiful morning, and the physical effort being made in the direction Francesca herself desired, it did her a great deal of good. And at Idleholme they met a glad welcome from the squire and Mrs. Idle. Almund was in Italy with his sister.

"He wanted us to go with him," said the squire, "but my mistress thinks nothing of foreign countries and their ways."

"Thomas is right," answered Mrs. Idle. "I say the West Riding is good enough for any Christian. And it is very dangerous traveling about, what with steam-boats, and railway-carriages, and custom-houses, and such like, not to speak of the unknown things you get to eat and drink. When I was in France, four years ago, I never felt safe a minute; did I, Thomas?"

Still, they were much interested in Dick's Mexican experiences, and a very pleasant evening was spent. And in the morning a little diplomacy secured to Francesca the circumstances necessary for her visit to Lancelot's mother. Dick went with her, and he was precisely such an escort as she desired. He did not trouble her to talk, yet if she wished to converse about Lancelot, he was full of sympathy and hope.

There was no sunshine when they left Idleholme—only a mild, hazy, diffused light; and just as they reached Leigh House a soft rain began to fall. Francesca looked at Dick, and he smiled assuringly back, as he said:

"I am not afraid of rain. I will do as we proposed—ride on to Crossley Hall. I want to talk a couple of

hours there ; then I will call at Leigh for you. Is that what you wish ? ”

She said it was, but her heart fell as she entered the farmyard of Leigh. There were several men busy in its precincts, and one of them assisted her from her saddle. He said Mrs. Leigh was at home, and opened a half-door which was on that side of the house, and told her to go to the room at the end of the passage. She followed his directions, treading as softly as if she wished to conceal her presence. At the door indicated she stood still ; she was sick with uncertainty and fear. She was afraid now to provoke the answer of her doubts. Perhaps suspense with hope might be easier to bear than the certainty she had come to ask for.

In a few moments she tapped at the door, and then opened it. There was no one in the room, and she sat down. The place was familiar to her. She had been warmed and refreshed there on the day the snow-storm drove her to refuge in Leigh. The very same parlor, and yet there were changes. The big oak chair of the master was not on the hearth. It was set back against the wall in a corner of the room. His slippers and pipe were not visible ; the dogs he loved were no longer stretched on their sheepskin rug ; one was dead, the other had voluntarily left his home and gone over to Crossley's to live. The violin and books that had been Lancelot's special tokens were removed. Excepting the big Bible on the folded-down table, there was not a book visible. No pile of newspapers, no guns in the corner or trout-rods against the walls. The room, in short, had the air of a room into which men never came.

Francesca was glad of a few moments' reprieve. A

depressing sense of sorrow stole over her. She could not escape its penetrating influence. It was as much in the air as the moisture was. She felt ill at ease, half-inclined to run away and abandon her intention. But the fear was not positive, and her intention was. So she sat still opposite an open casement, watching the slow, persistent rain. It made little ado, but it was drenching everything. The birds sitting droopy and silent on the ivy boughs were already draggled and miserable in it.

When Martha Leigh entered the room, she went straight to the open window and closed it. Her movements were hasty and irritable, and she turned angrily to Francesca, and said:

"Thou might hev hed the sense to shut the window when it was raining, I do think. Whativer does ta want here? And who art thou?"

Francesca's first feeling was one of proud resentment, but when Martha turned her face and she saw the misery it reflected, she was humbled before such sorrow. Rising gently, she went close to Mrs. Leigh, and said:

"I do not wonder you have forgotten me. I am so much changed."

"I see. Poor lass! What has been the matter with thee? *Why-a!* Thou art Squire Atherton's daughter. I do believe thou art."

"Yes."

"And whativer does thou want here?"

"I want to know where Lancelot is."

"I can't tell thee. I don't know where he is."

There was a tone in her voice that shocked Francesca, it was so final and so broken-hearted.

"Have pity on me. You are his mother, you must

have a kind heart. You are his mother, you must know where he is. Have pity on me. I am so miserable."

"I cannot help thee any."

"You can tell me where he is—if he is alive—if he is well—if he still—thinks of me."

She was holding Martha's arm; she was trying to make the wretched woman meet her imploring eyes. Martha would not look at her. She removed Francesca's hand and led her to a chair.

"Sit thee down," she said. "I cannot tell where he is. I don't know whether he is alive or dead, well or sick; and if he has forgotten his own mother, is it likely he thinks about thee? What did ta come here for? Crying and taking on in such a way! Thou oughtn't to do it. Will ta hev a cup of tea?"

"I want nothing but a word or two you will not give me. Do you not see I am dying of grief?"

"Don't thee talk to me about dying of grief. I bore the lad. I nursed him at my breast. I lived and moved and hed my being in him for seven and twenty years afore thou iver put eyes on him. Dying! What-iver are women made of now? If I can bide his loss, I think thou may make shift to live without him. He was none of thy lad, anyway."

"He was! He was! He loved me, and I loved him. I love him yet, better than my life." She covered her face with her hands, and sobbed as a child in overwhelming distress might sob.

Martha was not much touched. She had a contempt for a weeping woman. She did not know what to do in such cases. Petting, coaxing, consoling, treating them as wounded, suffering babies, was quite

out of her power. She went restlessly about the room, moving a chair here and there, putting things out of and then into their place, scarcely knowing the motive of her movements. Only she was annoyed. The sobbing girl whom she could not comfort—whom, indeed, she did not want to comfort—worried and vexed her patient mind. She could think of nothing but a cup of tea, and she made one and set it before Francesca, saying:

“There, now. Thou art nervous and fractious. Take a drink of tea. It’s a good thing for crying women.”

Francesca pushed it away. And in the act she caught Martha’s eyes, and compelled the woman to look at her, as she said:

“I ask you, by God’s pity, to give me a word from Lancelot, and you offer me a cup of tea. It is a shame of you! What a cruel heart you must have! Lancelot was his father’s son, not yours—not yours.”

Francesca had got beyond tears now. She felt wronged and insulted, and she spoke with an indignant reproach that brought color into her cheeks and fire into her eyes. Martha was angry, but the mood suited her better. And she noticed then how really ill Francesca looked—how her pretty face had paled and thinned—how slight her figure had become—what general ravage corroding, sorrowful suspense had made.

“Is that the way ladies talk nowadays?” she asked scornfully. “My word! When I was a girl, I would hev ‘got it’ if I hed spoke to any older than mysen in such fashion.”

“Forgive me—*mother*. I was to have been Lancelot’s wife. May I call you *mother*?”

"Nay, I think not. I am sure not. Thou hes just said Lancelot was not my son."

"I did not mean it. I was angry. I was wrong. Let me call you—mother. I have no real mother; only a stepmother."

"A 'stepmother'! Niver! Hes thy father got wed again?"

"Yes, many months ago."

"Poor lass!"

"Why do you not want me to marry Lancelot? Tell me, mother."

"I will! I will! Because Lancelot would leave his own house and land for thy house and land. He would go to live at Atherton Court, and this dear house be let to strangers or go to empty ruin. And *there is them that would not like it.*"

"But I like this house. I would come here and live with Lancelot. I would like to come and stay with you sometimes. May I?"

"No. Thou hed better keep away from here. But if ta married Lancelot, would ta live part of thy time here, and keep the house open and in fair order?" asked Martha.

"I would like to do so! Mother! Mother! If you know where Lancelot is, for Lancelot's dear sake tell me. He would like you to tell me. I am sure he would."

"I don't know where he is. I hed a line or two from him when he landed in Vera Cruz. He said he was going into the 'interior,' wherever that is, and he would write again when he got there. He hes niver written me another line."

"What did he go away for, mother?"

"It was said he went to buy cotton."

"Do you think he went to buy cotton?"

"My lass! Don't thee ask me for my thoughts."

Then there was a pause. Both women were silent. Both were thinking and feeling intensely. The day had grown darker and darker. The rain poured now. There was not a breath of wind. It was one of those lifeless, motionless storms which are such dead-weights on the mind. And the gray light in the room made everything gray, except Francesca's face, which had a kind of shining pallor that attracted Martha's attention, in spite of herself. Its expression was so hopeless, and full of that sense of "bearing" which women understand. This mood Martha could sympathize with; at least she was not made angry by its still endurance. After a few minutes' thought she said:

"Would ta like to see my big picture of Lancelot?"

"You could show me nothing I would like better, except himself."

"Come, then."

She led the way to the new wing, and with a trifling hesitation turned the key of Lancelot's room. It was quite dark. She groped her way to a window and opened the wooden shutters, and the gray light looked in upon the deserted place. The furniture was still in its proper positions. Lancelot had only removed a few small souvenirs. The walls were covered with pictures, but one stood against the wall unhung. It was an oil painting of Lancelot, taken at his majority. Its place was in one of the usual sitting-rooms, but Martha had been unable to bear its presence, and she had removed it.

The lifelike presentment was like the opening of the flood-gates of sorrow to Francesca. She stood before it gazing as if her gaze could force the silent lips to speak to her; then she knelt down, and kissed the face with flowing tears and words of fond endearment. Martha turned away from grief so poignant; she occupied herself in opening the other windows; in altering the position of chairs; in a kindly and rather noisy distraction, not devoid of sympathy, though expressed so strangely. And she neither hurried nor interfered with the passionate sorrow of the distressed girl. And perhaps that was the best of all sympathy, for in a short time Francesca's bitterly sweet orison was made. She took from her throat a square of white silk, and covered the dear face with it. Then she went to Martha and said simply:

"Thank you."

She would have liked to kiss the cold, gray face above her. To her it was not repellant. But Martha held herself away from any such demonstrations. She only said:

"If ta hes done, we can go downstairs again. I can't ask thee to stay any longer. I hev a lot to do to-day."

Francesca was standing by the piano. She opened it and touched the notes with a slow, uncertain hand. They fell thin and strange into the empty air. Yet the melody was a familiar one to both women. Mrs. Leigh had often paused at her work, or sat still with her sewing in her hand, to listen to it. She stood watching the girl at the instrument, her face catching color, her eyes light; the notes growing stronger, sweeter, firmer, till at

the last strain she found strength in her heart to voice the melody—

“Oh, so white! Oh, so soft! Oh, so sweet is she!”

The words fell one by one, with all the festive magnificence of accompaniment that love had given them. Martha had heard Lancelot ring them out in such clear, happy tones, as only birds in spring can reach. Francesca's voice was but their thin, far-away echo. But something in the effort had comforted her. She rose, and Martha put her gently aside, and began to close and cover up the instrument.

“I wouldn't hev let any one but thee put a finger on it,” she said; “no, not even Queen Victoria hersen.”

Francesca was standing at a table on which lay a book open, and turned face downward. She thanked Martha, and then lifted the book. It was a compilation of poems from various sources, but one was broadly marked, and looked as if it had been purposely left to attract attention.

“What is it?” asked Martha.

“A book of poetry.”

“He was always reading such nonsense. It did him a deal of harm. Love! Love! Love! As if life was nothing but a kiss and a song and such miff-maff!”

“The poem he has marked so broadly—look at it—it is not about love. It is about ‘Haunted Houses.’”

“Niver!”

“It is, really. See how he has penciled those four verses. Read them.”

“I hev'n't my spectacles. I don't believe I could read poetry, unless it was maybe a hymn of Bishop

Ken's. '*Haunted Houses!*' I niver heard of poetry iike that. I wish ta would read it to me. It must be varry queer stuff."

Then Francesca lifted the book again and read in a soft, solemn voice the verses marked by Lancelot:

" All houses wherein men have lived and died
Are haunted houses. Through the open doors
The harmless phantoms on their errands glide,
With feet that make no sound upon the floors.

" We meet them at the doorway, on the stair,
Along the passages they come and go,
Impalpable impressions on the air,
A sense of something moving to and fro.

" There are more guests at table than the hosts
Invited; the illuminated hall
Is thronged with quiet, inoffensive ghosts,
As silent as the pictures on the wall.

" We have no title deeds to house or lands;
Owners and occupants of earlier dates,
From graves forgotten, stretch their dusty hands,
And hold in mortmain still their old estates." *

"That beats all!" said Martha. "Is that poetry? My lass, it is true as gospel! I know! I know! '*Hold in mortmain!*' Of course. Leigh Farm is held in dead hands, and no living ones can alienate it. That is the truth. Give me the book. I wouldn't wonder but it was put there for me by *them that know*. I am obliged to thee for showing me such a bit of comfort. Come; we will go now."

She was averse to speak after this incident, though she clasped the book tightly and took it away with her.

* Longfellow.

And Dick was waiting; there was no excuse for longer delay. But Francesca felt that she had gained a little good will, and she ventured to ask, as she said "Good-by":

"Mother, if you do hear anything—will you let me know?"

"I shall not hear. Don't thee hev any such false hope."

"But if you do? He may write. Can we not at least hope he will?"

"To be sure, if we are set on that kind of folly—we can hope to catch larks if ever the heavens should fall. Thou wilt get a wetting; take care and not get a cold. That will be worse than love—I can tell thee that!"

And she turned dourly in, seeming almost to leave a shadow where she had stood.

CHAPTER XII.

HOPE AND TWO SAD WOMEN.

Ah, who shall help us from overtelling
That sweet, forgotten, forbidden lore!
E'en as we doubt in our hearts once more,
With a rush of tears to our eyelids welling,
Love comes back to his vacant dwelling.—*Austin Dobson.*

Going to die! For who shall waste in sadness,
Shorn of the sun, the very warmth and light,
Miss the green welcome of the sweet earth's gladness,
Lose the round life that only love makes bright;
There is no succor if these things are taken;
None but Death loves the lips by love forsaken.

—*Austin Dobson.*

ABOUT the middle of September the squire and his bride returned to Atherton Court. Great preparations were made for this event, and Loida took a special pride in delivering up her household charge with that kind of *éclat* which spotless purity and elaborate adornment can give. The new mistress of Atherton stepped across a threshold whose antique beauty was radiant with the flowers gathered that morning—dahlias and asters, lavender and marigold, and all the treasures of bronzing ferns and the autumn amaryllis.

She stepped across it with a smile of irresistible attraction—a smile that deprecated premature judgment, that asked for affection, and insinuated all it asked. She was a very pretty woman, quite forty years of age,

but looking much younger. Her dress was the perfection of taste—dark, rich, and of faultless fit. She was exquisitely booted and gloved, and her hat was piquant and becoming; altogether she gave the idea of a dainty bird in its fresh spring plumage.

Francesca and Miss Loida were in full dinner dress, and there was the stir and air of a festival throughout the house. Mrs. Atherton was charmed and charming, and the squire happy because she was happy. They came to the dinner-table together as radiant and as magnificently dressed as a bride and bridegroom ought to be. Indeed, the squire had renewed his youth. Instead of the slippered, indolent gentleman who had reluctantly gone to London, there was an alert, handsome man, quick at every point, appreciative of his fine wines and good cook, anticipating changes he had already projected. In fact, a man full of the reserved strength of many years, who had been suddenly awakened and vitalized by an absorbing affection.

He was, indeed, too happy himself and too much absorbed in his plans to notice much change in his daughter. Francesca was beautifully dressed in a pink silk frock, and its glow and shimmer gave to the fading beauty of the girl a fictitious color, which the squire did not analyze. He thought his daughter looked very well and very lovely; he thought Loida looked ten years younger, and he had become learned enough in toilet matters to know that she was a trifle old-fashioned in her style of dress. He bantered her about it, and was answered with a shade of offense: "Dick liked her dress, and she had the pleasure of dressing for Dick now."

Perhaps neither Francesca nor Loida thought the squire was quite as fine a gentleman as when he left them. He used to think for every one but himself, and now—

“He cares only for his new wife,” said Francesca. “He used to be so quiet, so restful, so easy to please; now I am tired of the laughing and talking and dressing, and going out, and he is as particular about our dress and the serving of the table as if he had a dinner-party every day.”

Which complaint was true enough. The careful state of the home-coming dinner was not relaxed; and if Francesca did not attire herself in accordance with it, she was made to feel that her father disapproved her carelessness. Mrs. Atherton was the keynote of the house, and she kept it up to its highest pitch of elegant order. And the marvelous thing was, the servants made no complaints. Under Miss Loida’s authority the least extra work was done under protest; the extra work under Mrs. Atherton became regular work, and they did it with alacrity and cheerfulness.

The very morning after her arrival she went into the conservatory and ordered the gardener to cut a large quantity of his finest flowers for the house. Loida was amused at the man’s face. He had always been stingy to the last degree of the conservatory treasures; Mrs. Atherton ordered them with lavish prodigality. The man gave her a look which had been wont to abash Miss Loida and Francesca, and even the squire; but Mrs. Atherton appeared quite unconscious of his disapproval. She went about the guarded walks, snipping here and snipping there, and laughing lowly, and mak-

ing merry asides to Francesca as she cut the rarest and loveliest blooms.

It was a just retribution for long-continued oppression, and Loida and Francesca could not help feeling a certain satisfaction in it.

"That man is a boor," said Mrs. Atherton, as they returned to the house; "and he will have to learn good manners or go."

And Francesca answered:

"You have cut more flowers this morning than he ever parted with before. He would scarcely give us any for the table the day you came home. If we should go back now, you would find him crying or in a passion."

Mrs. Atherton went back. The man was in both conditions.

"Send the flowers I cut to the house at once, Barker," she said.

"Yes, ma'am. Excuse me. You have spoiled the conservatory, ma'am."

"That is of no importance, for the house will be lovely, and the conservatory is to supply the house. I shall want more flowers in two days. I hope you will have them for me."

She did not notice either his distress or his temper; and the flowers were cut again on the second day.

With equally capable hands she took hold of the somewhat neglected village. Guided by her the squire found work for idle men, in ways he had never dreamed of. Mrs. Atherton saw fields that required draining; young plantations that required thinning; old timber that ought to be removed and cut up for use; cottages

on the estate that wanted whitewashing and thatching, and she said:

"What is the use, Rashleigh, of charity, when you can give work? Work is like mercy; it blesses him that gives and him that 'takes.'"

In October Loida was married. There was a little discussion about the place proper for the ceremony, but it was speedily settled in favor of Alderson Bars. It was impossible for Dick's mother to come to Atherton Court; she found any number of reasons rendering it impossible; and yet it was surely right she should be present at her son's marriage with Loida. The two women had worked and hoped together for Dick, and Loida wished her to share in all the results so patiently and lovingly waited for.

And at Atherton Dick was not enthusiastically welcome. The squire was not proud of his alliance. He would rather that the sister of his first wife had married a man whose past could give an enemy no advantage. He thought Loida was throwing herself away, and Dick was sensitive to the feeling. Besides, Tiphham Market church was Loida's own parish church, and the friends of both families worshiped there.

So Loida went to Alderson Bars a week before the wedding, and Francesca went with her. The squire and Mrs. Atherton arrived in time to take part in the actual ceremony, and they did not remain long after it. In some respects there was an air of disappointment about the festival. Dick and Loida were too quietly, solemnly happy for the typical idea. People do not work and wait ten years for a joy, and then take it with the careless enthusiasm of children. But Dick's face

shone with rapture, and Loida, in her bridal white, was like a fair lily, serene and still, and sweet as a lily from the gardens of Paradise.

It was while the bridal party stood around the altar of the ancient church that Mrs. Atherton was first forcibly struck by the appearance of Francesca. She was smiling, but Mrs. Atherton had a glimpse of the heart behind the smile.

"That little girl is miserable," the shrewd woman said to herself, "and I suppose it is that lover Rashleigh told me about. What was it he said? Did he not go away from her without a word? Something shabby of that kind I know it was. It is time I looked after that affair."

But she never found it easy to look after Francesca. She was sick and in trouble, and she took every opportunity to escape to the solitude in which her sorrow was most bearable. Mrs. Atherton could not tell whether this was a natural or an exceptional attitude, and she felt a delicacy in discussing it with her husband. It was so easy to appear unkind; so difficult to gain confidence against unspoken prejudice. Still she watched Francesca, after her return from Loida's marriage, with an interest not devoid of a sincere liking. The proud, shy, quiet girl attracted her, because she was sure she was neither proud nor shy, nor yet specially quiet by nature. The character was a cloak, assumed to repel or to conceal, and in either case she felt sorry for so young a heart thus hiding its sorrow.

Once or twice she said to the squire:

"Do you think Francesca is quite well? Is she as gay and glad as an English girl in her position ought to be?"

And the squire looked anxiously at his child and pre-

varicated a little in his answer. He saw the change in Francesca, but, in the first place, he did not see its full extent or estimate its danger, because in his presence Francesca was at her highest point. For this was the natural attitude of a proud girl who feels her grief is not shared, not even sympathized with.

Then, again, the squire really believed Francesca was mentally pouting. First, because he would not discuss Lancelot with her; secondly, because he had himself found another love and married. The supposition was a natural one; but even if the squire admitted some justice in it, he was a little angry at his daughter when he considered her changed air and manner. And, at the last, he always found the excuse which Francesca's love for Lancelot gave him; had she not loved so unwisely, so extravagantly, so regardlessly of himself and his happiness, he never would have gone to London, he never would have met his Clara. If, for instance, Francesca had married Almund Idle, he would have lived and died a widower, content with her happiness, and finding a new youth in her children. But this and that and the other had happened, and by the time the squire had considered all the conditions, he was ready to leap to his feet and emphasize his thoughts with an impatient stamp, and so away for comfort to his wife or his business, muttering:

"It was Lancelot here and there and everywhere. Lancelot and the mill, Lancelot and cotton and Mexico. It was Lancelot's father and mother; it was a, e, i, o, u, and sometimes w and y—yea, the whole alphabet of worries; and I was right to get a bit of comfort to myself, and I am glad I did it."

One day, some time after the new year, when cotton was beginning to be plentiful, and mills were at work again all over the country, Mrs. Atherton said :

"Rashleigh, I have been in the village to-day ; it is nearly deserted by the men. They have tramped off to get spinning elsewhere and left their families until they can send for them. The distress is very great still, and I say now what I said at first—give them work."

"But how can I, my dear Clara? My fields and woods are already clean as a park or garden. I cannot make work much longer."

"Yes, you can. Open that fine mill, and set the men and the women to spin cotton."

"I am not a cotton-spinner, and the mill is not mine," said the squire, in a decidedly angry voice. They were sitting at the dinner-table, and he lifted the decanter and poured out another glass of Chambertin, and so tried to turn the conversation. But Clara was persistent.

"Rent the mill."

"I cannot, Clara. The fellow that owns it went off without a word one morning. Nobody knows where he went to."

Francesca's face flushed scarlet, and she stood up and said :

"Father, 'the fellow' is my intended husband. I love 'the fellow.' I believe him to be an honorable gentleman in every respect."

Then, with considerable passion, she pushed her chair aside and left the room.

An hour afterward Mrs. Atherton knocked at her door.

"Francesca! My dear Francesca, let me come in," she pleaded.

Francesca opened the door, and, holding it, stood looking at her stepmother. She had been crying until she was sick. Her face was piteous, her eyes hopeless, but she had told herself as she went to the door: "I am the daughter of Atherton and the lady of the manor. I will not let this stranger either pity or scold or deceive me."

The thought gave dignity to her grief. She looked straight at her visitor, and waited for her to speak.

"Francesca, dear, let me come in. I want to talk to you—to comfort you—to advise you."

The poor girl shook her head at the mention of "comfort"; but she suffered Mrs. Atherton to enter. She went to a sofa and motioned Francesca to sit beside her. With some reluctance Francesca did so. She took her hand. It was cold and without response. The fingers lay limp in her own.

"I am sorry, Francesca, I named the mill. I have made you weep, and I wish only to make you happy. Do you believe me?"

"Yes, mother."

"Say *Clara*; I do not wish you to call me 'mother.' I am not your mother; no one ever could take a mother's place; but I am your friend, your true friend Clara. Tell me what you wish me to do for you."

"There is nothing to be done. But for all that, I am miserable. I am dying of grief, and nobody sees it; and I fear no one—cares for me."

"My dear, I see—and I do care."

"I have no one to speak to now. Even before Loida went away she was so busy, and her heart was so full and happy, it was not pleasant to trouble her—and she

forgot if I did not speak—and I was humbled and saddened by every one's neglect, and I could only go away and be silent. My heart is breaking. I feel a little weaker constantly. I have such hopeless days—such long, weary nights. I never thought that life could be so hard to bear. I want to shut my eyes and forget everything. No, I do not want to forget Lancelot.”

“If you would only tell me about him, then I could talk to you, and we could consider what ought to be done. Francesca, my dear, I was once very deep in sorrowful love myself. I wanted to die; and the man came back and we were married, and in three months I wished he had never come back, and in a year I had left him forever. When he died I was glad.”

“You cannot comfort me in that way, Clara. If an angel stood there and said there was anything wrong, anything unkind in Lancelot's heart, I would know he was an evil angel full of malice and wickedness. I will tell you what Lancelot is;” and then she did what Clara wanted her to do, opened her heart, told all its secret fear and doubt, all its heart-wringing uncertainty and suspense. “If I knew where he was! If he would only write! If I could write to him! If I durst go and find him!” These “ifs” were the thorns and nails of her poor heart's crucifixion. “But I am a fine lady. I cannot move. I cannot go anywhere.”

“If we only knew where he is, Francesca, I would find a way for you to go there.”

“You would? You really would, Clara?”

“Indeed I would. There are few men like your Lancelot. He ought to be found and brought home. I am going to have his mill opened and set to work if

possible. If your father will not do it, I have lots of money of my own. I will open it. It is a shame to see such a fine building useless; such wonderful machines rusting away."

And then the poor girl cried again, and hid her face in her hands, and tried to hide her sobs in her heart; and Clara put her arm round the slender form trembling and shaking in its storm of sorrow; and after awhile gently uncovered the wet, white face and kissed it.

"Listen, Francesca! There are men whose business it is to find out hidden things and to discover where lost people go to. You say Lancelot landed in Vera Cruz from the bark *Thetis*. I am going to send one of these men across the Atlantic to Vera Cruz. I will give him orders to find Lancelot if he be in this world. Now you can write as long and as sweet a letter as you desire to your lover; this man shall take it with him. And whatever else you say, tell Lancelot he *must* come home. Tell him his honor, his mother's honor, your life, depend upon his coming."

"His honor! I do not think that 'honor' is concerned in his absence."

"My dear, do not stand upon words. You have to use hyperboles to move a man at all. Some men care for 'honor' that are not touched by love or happiness, or even death. In love and war all expedients are lawful. The word 'honor' seems to me a very honorable expedient. Now, write your letter to Lancelot, and I will go and write to Captain Benton. Both letters will leave here to-morrow morning, and twenty-four hours afterward Captain Benton will be on the way to Mexico. What do you think of that plan, dear?"

"It is so wonderful, so comforting, so quick! I cannot take it in. I cannot understand it all."

"Never mind about 'understanding' now. You will have time to understand while Benton is going about the business. Have you pen, ink, and paper? Good. Then go to work. When you do not know what to do then is the very time to do something. When you cannot bear a thing any longer, then stop bearing, and make a move in one direction or another. The direction is evidently Mexico. Mr. Alderson has been in Mexico; why did you not set him to work? He must know people there. He could surely have written some letters—made some inquiries?"

"Dick was so taken up with Loida—and other things. I did not like to trouble them. They did not know I was suffering so much. They did not see."

"Lovers see nothing but each other. They are an abominably selfish crowd. I know because I have been there. There ought to be churches specially for them, and constant sermons on 'seeking not one's own,' and a lovers' litany, with an imploration to be delivered from selfishness."

"Have I been selfish?"

"Perhaps—and very unselfish also. I do not think I could have been so patient and smiling and ladylike with other lovers as you have been. In most respects you have behaved admirably. It takes a fine, well-bred nature to *bear*. A very vulgar one can *do*."

However, it is very certain that the only way out of the Slough of Despond is by action. It is like movement in a nightmare; stir under the incubus and it is gone. And though Francesca's despairing grief was

not removed by action, it was sensibly lightened. There was a movement made which admitted of hope's entrance. Something was being done for Lancelot, and it was not all simple endurance. There was also great comfort in Clara's sympathy. It was an active, loving sympathy; it resolved itself always into "what can be done?" If this effort fails what is the next move? She never thought of advising Francesca to forget her sorrow, or even to submit to it. The idea of resistance, of getting the better of adverse circumstances, was fundamental in Clara's character.

Consequently, even when Captain Benton had gone to Mexico, she was still mentally busy in forecasting probabilities and preparing to meet them. And she very soon found out two weak places in their first movement.

"You ought to have seen Mrs. Leigh before we sent Benton," she said to Francesca, "and we ought to have taken Dick Alderson into our confidence. Mrs. Leigh may have had another letter. Dick could have given advice worth having. However, we can send any information worth sending after the captain. When did you see Mrs. Leigh last, Francesca?"

"It is nearly half a year ago."

"You poor child! No word for half a year? And no one remembered your anxiety. What a selfish set of barbarians we have been! It is possible Mrs. Leigh has had several letters. And we may have sent Benton in a wrong direction."

"How unfortunate!"

"Not worth fretting over. If we have, then we must send some one in the right direction immediately. Do

not look so hopeless and frightened. I have plenty of money that ought to be on the move. Money is made round in order that it may roll. The first thing is to see Mrs. Leigh. Suppose we go to Idleholme to-morrow. We owe Squire Idle a visit. Your father may not wish to go. If so, the way to Leigh is plain and open. If he is so contradictory as to feel his social obligations pressing, and I dare say he will be so very natural, then we must seize the best opportunity that offers."

"And if none offers?"

"Then we must make one."

Before the subject could be further discussed, Squire Atherton entered. He was going to covert, and was dressed in a dashing Milton-Mowbray uniform of scarlet and green. It was the first time he had worn it since his marriage, and he came into the room with a little conscious satisfaction in his own appearance. Certainly he looked in it a very proper English squire, and Clara was enthusiastic in her approval. He blushed like a great, happy school-boy to her compliments, and asked both ladies to drive to cover and see the meet.

"We shall find a good dog-fox at Ashley pasture, and get away with him up wind. There will be some crack riders present, Clara. Francesca knows; don't you, little girl?"

"Yes, indeed," she answered, with a pretty flush coming into her cheeks. "Who can ride like Squire Atherton? Clara, there is a bullfinch hedge of fifty years' growth on Ashley pasture. It is so high that no horse can clear it, but Squire Atherton charges it at full speed and gets to the other side, while the bushes close after him and his horse as if a bird had hopped through

them. If the fox goes that way, would you not like to see my father go through?"

"No," answered Clara, with a comical shake of her head. "I do not care about seeing your father go through a hedge. And my sympathies are with the fox. I think it is a pity to teach such fine hounds such bad ways."

"Bless thee, Clara, it is as natural for dogs to hunt foxes as it is for men to hunt them. I don't know a much finer sight than a good pack all together, with heads up and tails down. My word! You'd think then that my Crafty and Gypsy and Gaylass and the rest of them were well worth the painting. Such scent and such sense! Fine pedigrees! Every one of them knew by instinct that a sheep was too sacred an animal for them even to look at; but I shall be late if I go on talking in this way. Will you go? I can send Crocker with the trap in ten minutes."

"No, Rashleigh, we will not go this morning. I want to go to Idleholme to-morrow. We owe a visit there that can no longer be delayed. Will you go with us?"

"Yes. I ought to go. My friend Thomas Idle is always glad to see me. Yes, I will go, Clara. Did you say to-morrow?"

"To-morrow. We shall stay all night, of course."

"Very well. To-morrow I am at your service. To-day—"

"You hunt a dog-fox. It seems to take quite a number of men and dogs to kill one dog-fox. I should like to see the fox better than the men. Good-morning, Rashleigh."

"Did I not tell you, Francesca, that the squire would be sure to wish to see his friend Thomas Idle?"

"I had a similar presentiment, Clara."

"My dear, there is no need of 'presentiments' about a man's movements. If you know him ever so little, you may reckon upon his '*whys*' and '*wherefores*' as certainly as a sum in simple addition. How far is Leigh Farm from Idleholme?"

"Six miles or thereabouts. We pass it. The large gates are on the highway."

"Then we must go direct to Idleholme, stay there all night, and the following morning I will ask Mrs. Idle to let a man drive you to Leigh. Your father and Squire Idle will doubtless be in the stables or kennels; that is their usual after-breakfast visit. You can dismiss the Idleholme man at Leigh, and as we shall not leave until afternoon lunch, you will have several hours with Lancelot's mother."

"Then you will call for me as you return to Atherton?"

"Yes. Try and be at the gate, so that your father may have no time to grumble and forecast darkness and danger and tribulations of all kinds."

The plan was so simple that it was scarcely possible for it to miscarry. The Atherton party arrived at Idleholme the following afternoon, and met a hearty welcome. Almund was at home, and there was a brilliant evening. For the new mistress of Atherton exerted herself to the utmost, and met in Almund a spirit bright enough to stimulate her pleasantries and also to understand them. Yet his attentions to Squire Atherton's wife did not interfere with the young man's devotion to

Francesca ; and the two old men watched it with appreciative glances ; they thought no one read but themselves.

So every one was in a happy temper ; even Francesca threw off her depression, and played accompaniments to Clara's singing, and smiled sweetly to Almund's confidences, for she was thinking of the morning, and that possibly in a few hours she would hear something of Lancelot.

It was fortunately a fine morning, though very cold. There had been a little snow, but not sufficient to hinder rapid driving ; and as soon as the two squires had trailed off to the stables, with their pipes between their lips and half a dozen hounds at their heels, Mrs. Atherton said a few words to Mrs. Idle, and before Francesca was quite ready, a light gig was waiting for her.

"We shall call for you about two o'clock ; be waiting for us : " and Clara drew the pretty, pale face down to her own, and with whispered good wishes kissed the girl and sent her away. And as Almund had gone into retirement, in order to smoke his first cigar in contemplative peace, no one but Clara saw Francesca depart on her loving errand.

The horse was a fine roadster, and the man a capital driver ; in a very short time she was at the large gates of Leigh Farm. They were rusty with disuse, and only moved with considerable effort ; but when they had been opened sufficiently for her entrance, she sent the servant back to Idleholme. His name was Jonathan Child, and he had the reputation of being a silent, selfish fellow ; but when Francesca gave him a crown, the touch of the silver went at once to his nervous center, and awoke what good feeling he possessed.

"Miss," he said, as he gathered up his reins again—
"Miss— Be you going in there, miss?"

"Yes."

"Into t' varry house, miss?"

"Yes."

"Well, I wouldn't, if I was you."

He even turned his head to watch the slight figure walking quickly up the long, winding avenue. And Francesca felt the chill of the implied warning as she caught sight of the house. It was hardly possible to realize the change that had taken place in half a year. Certainly there was some allowance to be made for the want of the summer's leaves and flowers and sunshine, but even admitting this natural reason, there was a change that the season was not responsible for.

The place looked deserted. The avenue was totally neglected. Long, dead grass clung around her ankles, and her feet sunk in the sodden masses of decaying leaves. There are moments when matter weighs upon us; when it is as mysterious and unsympathetic as spirit. The hard earth, the dead leaves, the bare, dripping branches overhead, seemed a part of her heavy heart. And why were they there at all? When? How? What for? No answer. No understanding of anything. The sadness that comes from sorrow endured without avail, invaded and, before she reached the door, conquered her.

The great white door! How blank and cold and unresponsive it looked! Indeed, she had to give up all attempts to enter by it, and go around the building to the smaller door in the other side. It was easily moved by an ordinary latch; and after knocking several times without being answered, Francesca went in. All was

silent as the grave. She went to the room with which she was familiar. Martha Leigh was there. There was a little fire in the grate, and she was bending over it. She lifted her head as Francesca entered, and looked at her with a quick inquiry; then, divining her disappointment, let her head fall down again.

"Mother, may I come to you?"

"Ay, come thy ways in. It is a cold day."

"Have you been ill?"

"Ay, I suffer a bit. Rheumatism. If Death would but come and deliver me, I'd make him freely welcome. I would that."

Then Francesca told her what Mrs. Atherton had done; but she listened without any enthusiasm, and she said, with an air of despair:

"If love can't bring him home; if such prayers and cries as I send after him can't bring him home—willing or not willing—does ta really think a bit of money can do it?"

"Mrs. Atherton says money can do everything."

"She is far wrong. It can promise everything, but it is a long way between promising and heving—a varry long way indeed."

Mrs. Leigh kept her eyes upon the fire. Francesca put her little wet feet toward its blaze. She wondered Martha did not notice how wet they were; wondered that she did not offer her any refreshment. For hospitality was second nature with Martha Leigh. She must have got far off from life in some way to forget its claims.

After a few minutes, Francesca asked if she might go up to Lancelot's room.

"Does ta want to see his picture?"

"Yes, mother."

"Here is the key. Go thy ways, poor lass. But don't thee touch t' piano. I couldn't abide to hear it. I hev'n't got the mournful music thou made on it out of my ears yet. Don't thee touch a note."

"I will not. I only want to see Lancelot's face."

"If ta loved him as I love him, thou wouldn't need a bit o' painted canvas to see his face. *Why-a!* I see the lad go in and out ivery hour of the day. I see him all night long. Sleeping or waking, I see him."

She rose up, as if to go with Francesca, but sat down again. She was suffering from rheumatism severely, and the house was cold and damp enough to induce the malady. So Francesca went alone. She opened the wooden shutters of one window, and knelt down before the pictured face. No painted saint had ever truer and purer worship. She kissed the smiling lips as the dead are kissed. She kissed the beaming eyes as if she was closing them forever. She wept before her lover with that passion of grief which comes from long suppression. No one there could see or hear her heart breaking. She could lament and wring her hands and cry out, as she longed to cry:

"O Lancelot! Lancelot! How gladly would I have gone with you! Oh, my love! My love! My love!"

No one interfered with her sorrowful visit. She wept her anguish in some measure away, and went downstairs calmed and comforted. Martha had spread a little table and made up the fire. She pointed to the teapot and the loaf, and permitted her to wait upon herself.

"I sent away all the servants at the end of the year," she said; "ay, a bit before it. A bad, wasteful, grumbling lot as iver was. I was glad to be rid of them."

"Do you live here alone?"

"I live here—but not alone. How many men and women hev lived here before me, does ta think? I hev plenty of company. We are varry thick with one another—varry good friends. They know I have done right to Leigh. They are satisfied. Stephen Leigh hes found out, and Lancelot Leigh will find out. There is no need to hurry. The 'time to come' is a long year—it is that. I hev something to ask of thee."

"I will do anything you ask me, if it be possible."

"What for should thou?"

"You are Lancelot's mother. I love you."

"I am a crabbed, queer old woman; how can ta love me?"

"I love you. What is the use of asking 'why' or 'how'?"

"To be sure. Listen, then. I am going the way of all the Leighs varry soon. Don't thee say 'no' or think I want comfort. I do not. I want to die. I'll shake hands with Death, and welcome him. There is only one thing I want to live for. I want to keep possession till Lancelot comes home. If I die before he comes, thou must try and find him; try and hear from him; thou *must hear from him whether or not*. Dost thou understand?—*whether or not*."

"I shall hear from him. I feel certain of it."

"Ay, thou wilt hear—for if there is no other way, *I will come and tell thee*. Mind that! As sure as I am

a living spirit, I will come and tell thee where he is. For he must let the world know he is alive."

"What has the world to do with Lancelot's life or death?"

"If Lancelot were dead, Sally Wood of Wood Hall, eldest daughter of my husband's eldest sister, is the next heir. And what does ta think? Joshua Newby is courting her. Newby says he is bound to hev Leigh, either by wedding or deading, if gold willn't do it; and I hev told him, he niver shall hev the right to enter Leigh. But does ta see what the scoundrel is after? His son will wed Sally Wood, and then he will buy the right from Sally, and come in here, and spread himsen before the living and the dead, as master of Leigh. I could not bide that, neither for the love of heaven nor the fear of hell. I would come back and slay him, someway. I would! I would! So thou must keep Lancelot in the land of the living. That is thy part. Thou understands?"

"Yes, mother."

"If any one says, 'Lancelot is dead,' threep them down as liars. Leigh House must stand empty till a Leigh comes to dwell in it. It niver hes gone in the female line, and it niver shall."

The subject excited her very much, and Francesca tried to pass it over, and talk of Martha's own condition.

"You ought, for Lancelot's sake," she said, "to live, and so take care of yourself. If Lancelot could see you and his home now, how distressed he would be!"

"Thorpe says I hevn't long to live. If I wanted to

live, I shouldn't die; but I don't want to live. I can do a deal more for Leigh out of the body than in it."

"Should you not have more warmth, more comforts, a servant to wait upon you?"

"I live as I want to live. I hev plenty of money. I need not grudge mysen any comfort—and I don't. But heat or cold, comfort or discomfort, when you are companying with death and racked with pain—what does it signify? Nothing at all." She was silent a little, and then she asked suddenly:

"Thou means to marry Lancelot when he comes back?"

"Yes. I mean to marry no one else."

"I will be glad to think of thee here. I like thee now. I wish I hed always liked thee; things might hev been a good bit different. Come here as often as ta can, when ta is married to Lancelot. I shall know it, I'm sure, and I will give thee a blessing."

So they talked until it was near two o'clock. Then Francesca bid her "Good-bye." She did not wish to make Clara's conciliation harder than need be, and she walked in the avenue until she heard the Atherton carriage approaching. It stopped at the gates of Leigh House, and Clara met her with that effusiveness of welcome which indicated a prior dispute. The squire was undoubtedly angry, but he folded the carriage wraps tenderly round his daughter, and felt a painful sense of heartache when he saw how wan and sorrowful she looked.

"How is Mrs. Leigh?"

It took him a few moments to compel himself to this courteous inquiry, but the kindness done, he felt its

influence; and when Francesca answered, "She is dying, alone, without a friend, and careless of all help or comfort," he felt honestly sorry.

"She is a very proud, sensitive woman," he said. "She was very rude to me once, but she did not know. It was the day of the funeral. I thought her slightly—off her judgment. God pity her!"

And even while the kindly prayer was uttering, Martha, half-unconsciously, was making for herself the same petition:

"God pity me! I meant to do right! God pity me if I hev done sinfully!"

For her punishment had become almost unbearable. The silence of her son was a cruel sorrow, but if the law should construe this silence as death, and suffer the next heir even a partial or limited possession, how could she bear it? She did not like her niece Sally; she hated young Newby. Sometimes she felt she could live in perpetual agony, only to live and keep Leigh House until her son came home to claim it. Then a miserable doubt invaded even this resignation. Would Lancelot live in it if he came back? Perhaps not. Still, his right would keep others out. And she had a hope that Francesca understood and would carry out her desires.

But what miseries sat in the lonely house with the lonely woman. She fought them with all her power; but intolerable pains and intolerable despairs filled her with mortal and immortal suffering. The house permeated with such influences took on, as a countenance would, an expression of being haunted. An unhappy atmosphere was reflected from it, and at night its one feeble light in an upper room thrilled every heart that

looked toward the forlorn dwelling with pity and with terror. What Martha Leigh was doing there and what she was enduring, no one knew. She made no complaint, and asked for no human help. In moments of intolerable anguish it was God she spoke to. It was to God only she cried: "Pity me! Pity me! Remember that I am but dust!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MARTHA LEIGH ATTAINS UNTO PEACE.

A Soul . . .

Joying to find herself alive,
Lord over nature, Lord of the visible earth,
Lord of the senses five.—*Tennyson.*

We hurry to the river we must cross,
And swifter downward every footstep wends ;
Happy, who reach it ere they count the loss
Of half their faculties and half their friends.—*Landor.*

A LIFE filled with duty may be a very noble life, but the heart craves some tender resting-places built by love, and wanting them, duty is very like a day of sunshine, or an orchard without singing birds. It was these little resting-places built by love and sympathy that made life endurable to Francesca during the following weeks. Her hopeful conversations with Clara—the tears she could shed in her company—the letters sent here and there for information—the things supplied topics of conversation that touched Lancelot, and made tangible sources of comfort and compassionate interchange of feeling, and thus enabled the unhappy girl to bear the long recurring days that brought her yet no tidings of her lover.

They were not days, however, devoid of interest in other directions. Clara was moving them in many respects to wise and kindly ends ; for, from her first com-

ing to Atherton, she had been grieved by the desolation of the village and the stagnation of interests which ought to have been working steadily for the good of all. The squire laid the blame on the war, and felt himself easy in thus shifting the responsibility. It was not pleasant, therefore, to have Clara continually introducing an unpleasant subject.

"That mill ought to be opened, Rashleigh," she said again one day, as they rode through the village together. "Look at those cottages standing empty."

"I do look at them very often," answered the squire, with some temper. "I spent a great deal of money building those cottages, and while the mill was running the rents were worth gathering. Now they are going to ruin, or they are sheltering some miserable family whose head has gone to Oldham or Clitheroe—or even to America, in search of work. I look at them very often, Clara."

"Open the mill, Rashleigh."

"I tell you it is not mine, Clara. It belongs to that young man whom Francesca is killing herself about."

"You ought not to speak of Miss Atherton as killing herself; though I suppose we all do kill ourselves, in some way or other, eating, drinking, loving, fretting, working, even hunting. Squire Foxly chose hunting. But I am talking about the idle mill and the empty cottages. I should rent the mill, if I were you, and set every loom to work. I do not like to see Atherton village so mournful and poverty-stricken."

"It is poverty-stricken; there are so many people here who have no business here."

"Then find business for them. Open the mill."

"Clara, if I did not love you so much, I should be angry at this monotonous cry of yours. Can you not understand that I should feel it a great degradation to become a cotton-spinner, a mere trader?"

"I cannot understand it at all. Why should it be more degrading to spin cotton to clothe people than to grow wheat to feed them? The occupations seem to me equally honorable. As for trading, it is the most ancient, honorable, and enterprising of occupations."

"The agricultural and pastoral life stands higher, Clara."

"Then it ought not to stand higher. And you have too much sense to think it does."

"Its antiquity—"

"Antiquity is worn out. Besides, if antiquity is worth anything, trading has plenty of it. Those agricultural patriarchs, counting their sheep and oxen and squabbling about water-holes in the desert, are commonplace enough put against the great merchant companies from Midian traveling down into Egypt with camels and swordsmen and all kinds of wealth. Rashleigh, I have heard with considerable weariness your monotonous cry about doing your duty by the land. Well, sir, you are neglecting your duty shamefully; you ought to double the value of every foot of land in Atherton village."

"There are certain prejudices, Clara—"

"I am sure you have strength of character enough to follow your convictions and your interests, and let 'certain prejudices' go to the limbo appointed for such useless lumber. I should rent the mill, if I were you; then you can rent your empty cottages and make every

one happy and Squire Atherton rich. Mr. Horsfall has begun to spin cotton."

"I do not indorse Mr. Horsfall's opinions."

"Squire Drayton is vamping about 'landed gentlemen' and coming to you to borrow money. I do not suppose you indorse Squire Drayton's opinions. You see, you could rent the mill from Mr. Leigh's lawyer, and when Mr. Leigh returns he will doubtless relieve you in a very profitable way of your responsibility. I have such a fine idea of the plan, that if you decline it, I think I shall speculate myself. 'Clara Mott Atherton, Cotton Spinner,' would not be a bad name for a firm. I have a lot of money as good as idle."

Squire Atherton looked at his wife with some anxiety. He could not tell whether she was in earnest or not. Clara made the impossible thing happen so often. Her face was speculative and thoughtful; she was smiling, and yet she appeared to be mentally adding up a sum. He thought it best to turn the suggestion into an unmistakable and preposterous joke, and she only smiled a little more, and said, with a nod of her head: "You will see."

And no man's heart is proof against the continual drop, drop of an idea. The idea either wins the heart or hammers it hard as iron. Squire Atherton's heart could not be hard to his wife's reasoning, and she taught him such clever ways of answering and combating prejudices that he soon felt a kind of pleasure in provoking an antagonist to conflict. He was sure of victory, for he never doubted his own arguments, and he never suspected his opponent had any argument worth considering. Clara taught him the word "obsolete," and he

blandly defined all old customs and prejudices by that word. She led him to have a special contempt for that condition she called "behind the times"; and so glorified the present era, with all its progressive thought and movements, that Squire Atherton, in adopting them, conceived a huge respect for himself as being a man greatly in advance of his neighbors.

Such changes were not, of course, made at once, and yet they were quickly made; for the mind, when put into favorable conditions for growth, progresses with that marvelous celerity which distinguishes all mental movements. It takes years for the boy to become a man, but a few hours is often sufficient to make a man turn out of doors his present mind and welcome one entirely different.

Squire Atherton's transformation was effected more gradually. He floated in his wife's companionship almost imperceptibly into a higher and wider stratum of thought. Her opinions, repelled at first, still struck fire against his feelings and intellect, and day by day he became possessed and enthused by them. To make money, to make himself the bread-giver to thousands, to become a living fountain of wealth, to double the value of Atherton land—these ideas grew into stringent motives for action, and he was led into a mental condition he would once have repudiated with scorn as one false alike to his principles and his order.

It must be admitted that the squire was also influenced by Dick Alderson, for Dick and Loida made frequent visits to Atherton; and Dick's descriptions of the Mexican grandees, who drew their immense revenues from mining, greatly impressed his imagination.

If Mexican nobles were miners, why could not English squires be manufacturers? Indeed, it often seemed to Clara that Dick had a secret longing for the life he had abandoned. She noticed that every time he came to Atherton he dwelt with more loving enthusiasm on the adventurous existence which he had led for ten years. She noticed that he had not reopened the bank, though he had been requested by a unanimous call of the people in the vicinity of Tiphham Market to do so. And Clara, putting these and other things together, argued that Dick did not find riding about his fields and going to the hunt a sufficient exchange for the excitement, the danger, and the rich results of his Western experience.

It is true, he had Loida and he had his mother, and he had one, nay, two, really charming homes. What more could he want?

“ The trivial round, the common task,
May furnish all we ought to ask,
Room to deny ourselves ; ”

but Dick could not attain to this condition. And Clara sympathized with him. Loida's sweet repose, her gentle content with life and Dick, her failure to see Dick's restlessness, irritated her. She felt herself compelled to try and rouse in the placid lady a thought that this sameness, though a sameness of love and happiness, might become a little fatiguing to restless spirits. One of these discussions brought out a fact which made her think well of Dick's forethought, and also showed her a way full of possibilities as far as Francesca was concerned.

They were all sitting together one evening, in the fall of the year. It was chilly and rainy, and there was a little fire in the grate. The squire was smoking, Francesca reading, Loida sewing, Dick looking into the fire—or the far West—Clara doing nothing with her hands, for her restless mind gave her sufficient employment. The languid melancholy of autumn was distinctly present, for unless it be in characters of vivid vitality, it is true that—

“The swift beat of the brain
Falters, because it is in vain
In autumn, at the fall of the leaf;”

and the chief joy seems to be quiet and to muse secretly over our own dreams.

“I suppose this is what is called a peaceful, simple, sweet, idyllic life,” said Clara. “I think ‘peace’ and ‘simplicity’ idols quite as little entitled to worship as graven images are. What can people do in such lives but fold any solitary talent they have in a napkin and bury it in a field?”

“But ther, Clara dear,” said Loida, in her sweet, low voice, “we are out of danger and out of temptation, and the very air is full of peace and rest, and our hearts are full of love, and what more can we desire in this unhappy world but peace and rest?”

As she spoke she looked at Dick, who did not lift his eyes or indorse her statement by even the faintest of smiles, while Clara’s looks contradicted the assertions even as they were made. And as soon as Loida ceased speaking, she said:

“‘Peace!’ ‘Safety!’ ‘Out of temptation!’ I do not think much of such words. They are mere words

—the Dogberry and Verges of morality.” And then, with a charming mockery, she quoted: “‘You are to bid any man stand in the prince’s name. But how if he will not stand in the prince’s name? Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go, and presently call the watch together, and thank God you are rid of a knave.’ Peace and rest, indeed! You may bid peace or rest, or even love, stand in any name you like; but if they do not stand? And if all you can do is to call the watch together, and try and thank God, and talk about knaves, what then?”

“Did you say ‘love,’ Clara dear?”

“Yes, Loida dear, I said ‘love.’ I think peace and rest are suffocating atmospheres for love. That is the reason I have labored like a galley-slave to set Raleigh to work in a mill. I am in hopes the mill will stir the stagnant air, and give love some chance to live and grow. Any plant but a weed dies in perpetual sunshine.”

Dick looked at her with a bright, thoughtful face.

“Have you heard of *Nirvana*?” he said. “And what do you think of such a state, Clara?”

“I think *Nirvana* might be the heaven of a Platonic oyster, or a jelly-fish in tropical seas. I could never dream of *Nirvana*.”

“But, Clara, the jelly-fish has already explained that it is destitute of a sensorium.”

“And *that* is where it is, Dick. We *have* sensoria, and sensoria make *Nirvana* impossible; though, indeed, I have been at some places here that were even worse. Shall I ever forget Mrs. Sykes and her evening party?”

"I was not there," said Loida.

"Unfortunately Francesca and I were there. It is easily described: We sat about the room, quiet as a funeral, in the midst of many candles. I was hysterical with the silence. I had to go to the piano and sing, or I should have shrieked. I am anticipating the opening of the mill. What a pleasure to hear the rush of steam, the rattle of machinery, and the 'hum-m-m' of wheels."

"Clara dear, I have heard the noise of the mill. I thought it dreadful. If cotton could only be spun without noise."

"I do not suppose it would then be spun at all. Fancy a silent factory!" cried Clara. "How oppressive it would be! No one could do monotonous work without noise; it would be unendurable; it would drive the workers crazy."

Dick sprang to his feet.

"By Saint George, you are right, Clara!" he cried. "I have seen such noiseless mines in Mexico—penal servitude. Dear me! I was thinking of Mexico, feeling glad that I still had a hold on the country. After all, there was a great charm in going to work every morning with the hope of a 'find' that might be a fortune. You sow a field, and know almost to a shilling how much its harvest will be worth. You go to your mine, hoping everything, for everything is possible; and in mining you set your hopes to the possible, not to the probable."

"You still have a hold on the country?" asked Clara. "What do you mean?"

"I did not sell my right in the San Rayas mine. I

could not sell advantageously at the time, and now I am glad of it, for my last letters from Mexico say that there has been a new *labor* opened up; that is, a new vein of silver. I may have to return and look after my interests in it."

Loida dropped her work and seemed unable to speak. Dick took her hand and answered her terrified inquiry with an assuring smile.

"I shall take you with me, Loida—if I have to go."

Then Clara perceived a singular advantage, and she glanced intelligently at Francesca as she answered for Loida, the quiet English lady being nonplused by the very suggestion of her going to Mexico:

"Loida, how charming! How delightful! How perfectly delightful! Loida, how I envy you! To go to Mexico! To breathe its exquisite air! To see such a picturesque life! I would give a great deal to be you. Rashleigh, I am sorry now I persuaded you to begin spinning. We might have gone to Mexico with Dick and Loida. What a trip it would have been! And then we could have come back by way of New York."

The squire could hardly have looked at his wife with more amazement if she had suggested a summer's trip to Jupiter, with a return call at the moon. And he answered, with an almost comical decision:

"I shall never go to any part of America in this life, Clara."

Clara shook her head with the air of one who pities and consoles.

"Never mind, Rashleigh," she said. "This life is only a chapter in an eternal book of life. The scene

of the next chapter may, perhaps, be laid in America. I think we have good reason to hope so. An American wife in this life is a kind of I O U to an Englishman that his next experience may be in America. Regard me then, Rashleigh, as 'a promiser of good things to come.' "

She was happy, she was hopeful, she saw a door opening for Francesca, though Francesca did not yet see it for herself. And as Clara was not ready to draw any attention to it, she talked in a fashion which no way represented her real thoughts, but which always gave the squire and Loida and Francesca plenty of occupation to apprehend.

In the morning there was a very large mail, and no one had the leisure to perceive that Francesca received some unusual communication. It was an old-fashioned letter, folded as letters were folded before the days of envelopes, and it was sealed with wax, though wax had long given place to mucilage. But the writer of this letter was Martha Leigh, and Martha was faithful to the old methods she had used in her youth.

"I'll niver seal my letters any such way," she said to Lancelot, when envelopes were first brought to Leigh House; "it's a way out of nature, and I'll niver be the one to ask my tongue to do the work of my hands."

Francesca guessed in a moment the writer of the letter, and her loving heart beat with a fresh hope.

"Surely Mrs. Leigh had heard from Lancelot, or perhaps even—Lancelot had come home!"

She slipped out of the breakfast-parlor as quickly as possible, and, after a moment's hesitation between the garden and her room, she chose the garden. The

maids would be upstairs, and she felt as if she could not endure the eye and the ear of any woman. So she walked down the terrace to the lower garden, and, in the solitude of the apricot standards, broke the seal. It was from Martha Leigh. And every letter of the sad epistle, though large and clear, was shaken by the palsy of death.

“My dear,” said the dying woman, “my dear, I am going out into the great dark. I may live one week or happen two weeks, no longer; so come to me if you can. My lad has never sent me another line. His silence has been a sharp knife; it has dug my grave. But he is not dead. He will come back here again. Tell him I died blessing the very thought of him. Tell him not to judge me. I am going to the righteous Judge of the whole earth. My sentence is with Him. I have suffered since I saw you. I have been racked with pain and with heart-longing and with fearful looking forward. I would like to see your face once more; but I can die alone. My dear lass, it is a hard fate to dree when you have to stand in the way of Fate. I did what I thought was right to every one—dead and alive—and I got the wage of the stand-between—ill from both and all. Sally Wood has married young Newby; they think Lancelot is dead. He is alive. Stand by that. Say you are sure of it. You may be. One that does not lie has told me so. And Lancelot dead would have spoken a word to his mother. It is the living that forget us; the dead have better memories than the living. God bless you! I fear I shall see your face no more. It is very dark to go away. If there was one to hold my hand! Have I done wrong? Nothing has come right. It is all a maze of sorrow and trouble. I have been three days writing this; I am just stepping into my grave. Good-bye, my dear. Tell Lance—it is all over. I can write no more—pain and pain and sorrow—and a thick—cold darkness. God—be merciful. Pray for the soul of Martha Leigh.”

No word from Lancelot. No word at all. The letter was ablow. Some how, she had always anchored

to the belief that Lancelot's mother and home would bring him back. And the strange old woman, with her heart full of love, was dying. All her longing had been useless. Lancelot had not felt it. What did it matter if he was alive, when the circumference of the world was between them? For the first time she had a sentiment of anger against her lover. No circumstances could excuse such cruel neglect of his mother. And oh, how cruel his silence to her was!

She did not weep. She had passed that possible comfort. The source of her tears was dry. With the letter in her hand, she went back to the house. Loida was there and Clara. To one of them she must speak; and after a moment's thought she looked into the parlor in search of Clara. The quick sympathy in her bright face answered the unspoken request. In ten minutes she was sitting by Francesca's side, listening to the last words of the lonely woman going out into the dark without a word of love to cheer her.

"Francesca, you must go at once to Leigh House," said Clara.

"I will go as soon as possible, Clara. I must get my father's permission."

"I will give you that. Your father has gone to Haretop, and may not be back until to-morrow night. I would go at once—this very hour."

Francesca smiled. "Of course you would go this very hour, Clara. I could not do anything in such a hurry. It would make me ill. Things have to be considered."

"I had forgotten that it takes an English lady three days to consider, and then three more to move upon

her consideration. That is a week. And the poor, heart-broken woman has given you a week; so you may possibly see her alive. If she had written to me, Francesca, I should have packed a valise and been on the way to her at this very moment."

"You have been trained to think and act as if impediments did not exist, Clara. I have not. Hurry petrifies me. I should be ill and a trouble instead of a help."

"If the house was on fire, you would brush your hair and put your collar on, I have no doubt. If you saw Lancelot coming up the terrace, you would wait until the footman brought you his card. Francesca dear, if you would only be in a hurry, or go into a passion, or shriek, or say a few dreadful words, or do any other womanly thing, you would not need the doctor. In spite of your heart-sickness, you would get some life and some color. Do put the house in a fuss, and send impossible messages to the stables, and be on the way to Leigh in forty minutes. I will help you."

"Mrs. Leigh will not expect me for a few days, and I do not think I ought to go without father's permission. He is so jealous wherever Lancelot is concerned."

"Very well. I often wonder if the earth going round its axis does not put on the drag when passing England. Life's wheels run so slowly here."

"I suppose there is nothing new to tell Mrs. Leigh?"

"Nothing I would tell her. I had a letter from Captain Benton this morning."

"Is there any hope, Clara?"

"None, my dear. The captain says he easily found traces of him at Vera Cruz, at Bocca del Rio, and at

other towns between Vera Cruz and Mexico. He stayed at the Mercado Hotel, in the Plateros Mexico, and his trunk remained there for many weeks."

"Then Benton supposes him to be dead?"

"He thinks so. Assassinations are as common as the nightfall. A stranger's life is not worth a dollar unless he is able to protect himself. So Benton says."

"He found no certain trace of Lancelot's death?"

"No more than of his existence."

"Then I will believe Lancelot's mother, and she says he is alive. A dying mother knows more than a detective. She sees further, and feels where she cannot see."

"When you come back from Leigh, I have something to say to you."

"You can say nothing, Clara, that I will not gratefully listen to. All your words are good words."

"Thank you, dear!"

And Clara kissed the pale, young face, so full of sadness and repressed suffering, and wondered that the little mystery in her speech roused neither interest nor curiosity.

"I will get ready to leave, Clara, and when father returns, if I have his permission, there need be no delay."

And, not unkindly, Clara expressed by a slight movement of her shoulders her incomprehensibility of such deliberate movements.

On the evening of the next day Squire Atherton returned from Haretop. He had had a very pleasant visit, he was in a particularly happy mood, and he did think it a little hard to have his sporting adventures interrupted by a discussion concerning Martha Leigh.

That night he refused to see any reason at all for Miss Atherton visiting the dying woman. Indeed, he asserted that from his own observation he thought her a very improper person to visit.

"She isn't herself at all," he said. "She gave me such a turn as never was, and if she should go into one of her tantrums with Francesca, there is no telling what would happen. *Why-a!* It was only last month Joshua Newby tried to have her put in safe keeping. He said his son had married the next heir—failing the missing one—and that he was sure she would burn the house down if things went as she did not want them to go."

"Lancelot will come back," said Francesca, with a quiet decision.

"I wish to goodness he would, I am sure. I would then, mebbe, have some good of my own daughter, and my own wife would not be bothering my very life out to run his mill. I wish to goodness he would come! It seems like his very name spoils a pleasant evening."

The next morning, however, he had changed his views on the subject; that is, Clara had had an opportunity to reason with him, and he had adopted her views. He had been made to see the lonely, broken-hearted woman at the grave's mouth, and he had been informed of the utter failure of Benton to find any trace of Lancelot.

"He says Lancelot Leigh was last seen in the neighborhood of the Necatitlan Square, a place always dangerous for a man in a European dress. There was a bull-fight in the vicinity, and it is supposed he went

there. Benton says, further, that it is a haunt of cut-throats—of men who would murder a foreigner for a few *piastres*—and he feels sure that the next day Lancelot's body lay behind a certain strongly grated window between the Alameda and the Paseo of Bucareli—the window of the Mexican morgue."

"Have you told Francesca?"

"Not as I have told you. She still believes her lover is alive—and I think so, also."

"But why?"

"I do not know 'why.' If I had reasons for my belief I should not believe. Let Francesca go and see Mrs. Leigh. It can do her no harm, it may do her much good. She looks very frail and ill. Dick will drive her there. If she stays at all, it will be at the Idles'."

And of course Mrs. Atherton won her plea. The squire came downstairs next morning with the permission on his lips, and he gave it to his daughter with a kiss full of affection.

"Thou art such a little lass as never was!" he said fondly. "Thou hast Clara as much in thy power as thou hast me and everybody else."

It was full eleven o'clock, however, ere Francesca left Atherton, and it was fully four days since Martha's letter had been posted. In that space of time she might be much worse, or the attack might be past and she might be recovering. If so, it was agreed that Dick should see her. He could tell her many things about Mexico, and perhaps give her some fresh hope about her lost son. Under the circumstances, he thought it would be a kind act to speak of his possible

journey back to Mexico as a certainty. He was going to ask permission to see Lancelot's likeness, and he had no doubt he could learn the face by heart and remember it.

The conversation resulting from such plans and hopes was of course all in one direction; but it was full of interest to both Dick and Francesca. Dick liked to talk of Mexico. He was in the middle of an animated description of the *Merchants' Arcades*, "where the crowd was as thick as smoke," when they came in sight of the little churchyard on the wold Francesca had passed the day on which she first saw Martha Leigh. There was a crowd in the yard, and many carriages outside the gate.

"It is a funeral," she said, laying her hand on Dick's arm to stay his conversation. "It is Mrs. Leigh's funeral, I am sure. Oh, why did she not send for me sooner!"

In silence they drove to the church gate. Several men were standing around watching the horses. They were not talking, and the solemn voice of the priest at the grave-side seemed to fill all the space around them. Dick asked very softly whose funeral it was, and the man questioned answered:

"It is Mistress Leigh's burying. She died Monday night some time. It was sudden at last, I should think."

Then they entered the yard and joined the crowd around the grave. Squire Idle was among them, and he and a white-headed man, whom Francesca instinctively knew to be Doctor Thorpe, assisted the rector and the sexton in the last sad rites. The doctor was weep-

ing. In days long gone by he had loved Martha very fondly. So also had Squire Idle. It was these two friends of her youth that laid her in her grave. All that her son ought to have performed they did; and Francesca was glad to see even this affectionate sorrow.

As the crowd dispersed, she drew closer. She loosened the knot of white ribbon from her throat, kissed it, and dropped it upon the coffin. Squire Idle had gone away unconscious of their presence. Doctor Thorpe remained at the grave until it was filled and the turf laid back upon the clay. Dick and Francesca walked into the church and read the gravestones, and talked softly of what was best to be done.

They decided to return to Atherton, and were about to enter their carriage when Doctor Thorpe approached. He said, shortly :

"I am Doctor Thorpe, and I know you are Miss Atherton. *She* was very restless to see you. I thought of writing to Atherton a week ago. I wish I had."

"I wish so, with all my heart."

"Poor Martha! Poor Martha! How she suffered!"

"Who was with her?"

"Not a soul—I mean no human friend or helper. There are indeed a poor old man and woman in the house—poor, far-off relations, but they were asleep."

"Why did Lancelot go away? Oh, Doctor Thorpe, if you know, tell me!"

"I cannot tell you 'why.' I may know—'why'; I think I do know 'why'; but it is not my place to talk. Far from it. I loved Martha Leigh when she was little more than a child. If her son left her, I think he did right. I promised Martha to take care of everything

for him. It is the last thing I can do for the woman I loved."

"Her death was very hard?"

"Very! Very! She longed for just one word out of the great silence; she never got it. She was tortured by her conscience and tortured by her heart. She lived in another world to ours. No one knew her. No one can judge her. She had hopes and despairs beyond our bearing. I hope she has peace at last, if, indeed, to such a shade peace be any blessing."

"She must have known she was dying. Indeed, she wrote and told me so."

"She knew right well. She had tied a napkin carefully under her lower jaw to support it. She was stretched decently in a winding-sheet. Her eyes were closed, her hands clasped. She had, in fact, prepared herself for her burial. A strange, strong, loving, hating, immortal woman. For I cannot—though her body lies there—I cannot think of her as dead."

"Whence come we? Whither go we?" Dick's face was full of speculation and trouble. He was thinking of many a tragic death which he had seen, but of none so mournfully tragic as this lonely, conscious outgoing of Martha Leigh.

"Whence come we? Whither go we?"

Again Dick asked the mighty questions, with a troubled, far-off look into the wide horizon, and the doctor repeated them after him, adding:

"There is no answer; not even an echo from the shores of the Unknown."

And then there was a sad pause, which was broken by Dick saying slowly one of Sir Alfred Lyell's verses:

“ ‘ All the world over, I wonder, in lands that I never have trod,
Are the people eternally seeking for the signs and steps of a
God?

Westward across the ocean, and northward across the snow,
Do they all stand gazing as ever? And what do the wisest
know? ’ ”

“ Ah, Dick! Ah, doctor!” cried Francesca, clasping her hands in the fullness of her soul’s enthusiasm. “ We *know* that we shall be satisfied. The land of our desire, the land which we call heaven, is not a dream; it is a reality.”

“ My dear, I have seen—I have seen all kinds of souls go forth; brave, strong ones, like Martha Leigh’s, who sent word to her dead that she was coming, and bid them meet her; others that lay down with as little concern as if they were going to sleep for a little while; others that went dry-shod over the dark river in the morning light, with a vision of the waiting shining ones; and, again, wise, thoughtful souls, who felt at the last all faith and hope gulfed, and in an agony of fear and doubt groped everywhere in the universe for the black doors of annihilation. And, in spite of all we know, life and death are the great mystery. Sometimes I have even thought they were synonymous terms, and that when I stood by the dying I came to see fresh life given, in a certain sense, to *accouch death*. We are alone. All have gone away and left poor Martha, and we must go, also. It grows late, and you have a long drive. Good-bye.”

Francesca stayed him yet a moment while she asked:

“ You will not let any one enter Leigh House? It would grieve her even yonder.”

"While I am keeper of the threshold no one shall enter that she would bar the door against. I will live there myself, if it be necessary. I have the power, or can take it. Adieu!"

They watched him ride slowly away, a plain-looking, oldish man, small, stout, and commonplace, but living amidst the great mysteries of life, and nourishing and cherishing his soul on them. Dick unfastened his horses and prepared for their homeward drive, and while he did so Francesca walked alone to the new-made grave, and vowed a vow to the woman whose clay image it kept.

And for a long while she was very silent, and Dick let her think. His own mind was busy. He was thousands of miles away, when he heard a low voice singing the saddest little wail of minor music. It was at his side. It was Francesca. He came sharply and sorrowfully back to reality, and the mournful notes of the dirge fitted his restless, solemnly wondering mood so well, he could not choose but listen to them and anon catch their meaning, and sing them also:

" " They have buried her here to-day,
Set, sun, set out of my sight;
They have buried her here to-day,
Come, deepening gray twilight;
Stay, lingering—gray—twilight;
And afterward come the night.' "

CHAPTER XIV.

“THEY WHO LOVE SHOW THEIR LOVE.”

“ Every time
Serves for the matter that is then born in 't.”

“ Hope,
Best apprehender of our joys, which hast
So long a reach, and yet canst hold so fast.”

“Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie
Which we ascribe to heaven.”

Strong reasons make strong actions.—*Shakespeare.*

THE night was dark and rainy, and the ride back to Atherton very melancholy; but how pleasant was the thought of home and all its love and comfort! From afar the lighted windows of the Court showed them a welcome; and the little surprise of their earlier return added a kindlier tone to their reception. Dick thought he had never before seen Loida look so charming; certainly she had never before met him with such a delightful show of her affection. For if Dick had one fault with his beautiful wife, it was that she restrained too much all show of the really deep love she bore him. But this night she rose up blushing with delight at his entrance. She took his hands; she let her eyes seek from his the embrace he was proud and happy to give. Part of this sweet effusion was doubtless due to the un-

expected joy of his return that night ; but mostly it was due to some words Clara had let fall as they sat together that afternoon.

The squire had just left them for his usual tramp, and perhaps there was—or perhaps Clara thought there was—the faintest shadow of wonder or contempt on Loida's face at his boyish delight in the affectionate compliments and charges of his wife. “He was to be sure and take care of himself—not to get his feet wet—not to ride horses nobody else would mount—if he took his gun, not to try and hop through a hedge as if he thought himself a bird”—and so on indefinitely. And after all, a quick following of him to the open door for a final kiss, though Clara pretended that “she had forgotten to look whether he had his gaiters on or not.”

All this demonstrativeness of love was foreign to Loida's ideas and experience, rather than it was aside from her real disposition. Perhaps if Clara had analyzed the shadow on her companion's face, she would have found more of longing than of wonder or contempt in it. However, it was Clara's way always to face what annoyed her, and she said reflectively as she resumed her sewing :

“Men do so love to be petted ; they are as hungry for a few sweet words as a baby for its mother's breast. And when it is so easy to make them happy, do you not think, Loida, that we ought to do so ?”

“I suppose we ought.”

“Rashleigh went away with such a glow in his heart, so elated, my dear, that nothing on earth could hurt him. He would ride like a spirit or swim like a fish, or do any mortal thing as an immortal ought to do it.

My dear, if you can kindle such a glow in a man's heart, you may send him into the Stock Exchange to make a fortune out of nothing, or do any other impossibility. I dare say if you had written letters to Dick full of red-hot adjectives, he would have been home, with his pockets full, in five years. Men are made that way, my dear."

She said a great deal more on the same subject, touching with a delicate, clever innuendo the fact that Dick was a man specially needing love's loving-kindness; and as she talked, the voices of both grew more earnest, and the one woman was brave enough to say and the other woman was brave enough to hear words that touched two lives with a fresh glory even to the grave. And the first result, as far as Dick was concerned, was that unusual welcome home—the blush, the kiss, the eager inquiry as to his desires, the ready service love gives so gracefully. And Clara, with a pretty tact, made her anxiety about Francesca a screen for Loida's unprecedented show of tenderness. She insisted on twenty practical inquiries into damp and chill and hunger and thirst, and finally left the girl cuddled close to her father's side, to give special orders about supper for the travelers.

Then the squire said:

"Thou art home a deal sooner than we thought for. Has something gone wrong?"

"I hope not; I think not, father. Mrs. Leigh is dead. We were just in time to join the funeral. Squire Idle was there, but he seemed full of thought, and he did not see me."

"God give her soul eternal rest! She was a woman

full of whimsies and troubles. A very strange woman. A very sorrowful woman, I think."

"In this world, father, who are quite happy?"

"Sometimes some of us fancy we are happy; eh, Dick?"

Dick was sitting quiet, with a smile on his handsome mouth. At that hour Dick at least was happy. But when the squire explained his question, a quick solemnity absorbed the dreamy light of joy, and he answered slowly:

"As far as I have seen, every soul has trouble of some kind."

"And for every one, Dick, there is also death."

"My dear Francesca, I do not call death sorrow. I have seen death watched for, longed for, and prayed for. This little earth is but a lodge in the universe, and we are but tenants at will of our place in it; but—

" 'The heavens are measureless; the dead are free!
With their brief day on earth, their sorrows cease.
O Grave, this is thy victory!
O Death, this is thy peace!'

I heard a man dying, alone at the bottom of a deep mine, say those words. He said them in a rapture. He was a young Englishman whom I tried to befriend. I never saw a smile on his face until the hour of his death. But if there be a true joy upon earth it springs from love—from love's labor or from love's sacrifice, or love's pleasure shared or love's sorrow shared. All other joys are but the shadows of joy. They fly away and are not."

At this moment there was a simultaneous opening of

doors, and from the kitchen there came the sound of a fiddle and laughter and interrupted strains of song. Dick listened curiously.

"I could almost swear," he said, "that I have heard an old Spanish gypsy sing as some one is singing in your kitchen, squire."

"Not unlikely, Dick. It is a gypsy singing, and doubtless he is singing a song as old as their thieving race. My word, what thieves they are! My game-keeper calls them 'the foxes of mankind.' Toro, who is singing, says he respects me because he never could pick my pocket. Have you gypsies in Mexico?"

"Plenty of them, and never two or three together without a horse or an ass among them. They make fortunes there by telling those of other people. Miners are superstitious. - Well, squire, I do not believe any one can work hundreds of feet under ground and not get superstitious. Everything is mysterious in those living graves. There was a man at San Rayas who was rich, and he had never lifted a pick. He had always the good fortune to be out of such work; he toiled with a piece of paper and a pencil, and made more than I did."

"Was he a gypsy?" inquired Francesca, who was listening with a face full of interest.

"No; he was a native of London. He had been at Eton and Oxford, but he had what he called 'celestial affinities,' and he lived among the stars. In other words, he was an astrologer."

"Such nonsense!" said the squire contemptuously.

Dick shook his head.

"If you had heard Saville talk, you would not have

answered him with 'nonsense!' Answer me his first argument."

"What was it?"

"Admit that our world was at one time a part of the sun. Is not that so?"

"I do not deny it; but what then?"

"Admit that day and night, seasons and tides, would be unintelligible were no account taken of the sidereal influences."

"Well, what by that?"

"It is contrary to all analogy that their influence stops there. The magnetic storms which rage through the earth synchronize with corresponding phenomena in the sun. The rays of some planets have more powerful chemical action than others. When certain planets arrive at certain points, we have earthquakes; and a famous scientist connects the solar spots with famine, and, consequently, with financial stringency and commercial disaster; and so, you see, sends us to the sun for forecasts of the money market." *

"Now, Dick, thou had better stop romancing!"

"Romancing! Saville said that, with the single exception of astronomy, astrology was the most exact of all the sciences. You see, he was sure it was a science. He asserted that man, being a product, not only of the earth, but of the universe, was also profoundly affected by the telluric influences in ascendancy at the time of his birth. He showed me published 'nativities' of famous men who were either insane or whose genius touched insanity, and they were all born under the same stellar influences."

* Huth's "Life of Buckle."

"Does he mean to say that every one born at such conjunctions is insane? What nonsense!"

"No; he did not say that, because there are countless hereditary and other modifications; but he said that insanity rarely, or never, happened without the conjunction of Saturn or Mars with the moon or Mercury. Nine notoriously insane princes were born under this conjunction. Swift, Southey, Moore, Faraday had the same conjunction; it was genius in early life, it was insanity at the close of life. The astral influences are modified by the physical conditions waiting for them, as the produce of a seed is modified by the soil into which it is dropped. I tell you this as told to me; take it for what it is worth."

"Well, Dick, I should say it was not worth much. Clara, come here, my dear. Thou has missed a queer thing about the stars. Come and listen to Dick. He thinks he is in Mexico, I'll be bound."

Clara came forward with a letter in her hand.

"Toro brought it," she said, "and he wants a shilling for his trouble. He has got the maids hysterical with his singing and dancing, and I am trembling for my silver spoons."

Dick took the letter, and as he looked at it his face flushed and his hands nervously broke the seal.

"It is from Mexico," he said, "from my old partner—he wants me—he wants me at once—there is an offer for the mine—a big offer. I must go as soon as possible. What luck it is!"

He had carelessly given a servant a piece of silver for Toro, and was reading and commenting as he read, with the utmost enthusiasm. Loida had risen and gone

to his side. The squire was watching him curiously. Clara stood on the hearth looking thoughtfully into the fire, until she suddenly lifted her face and darted an inquisitive glance at Francesca. She, of all present, seemed quite undisturbed by the letter. That Dick should get a letter from Mexico was natural enough; she scarcely considered the circumstance; but as soon as the current of the conversation changed, her mind went voluntarily back to the channel in which it loved best to move and to speculate. Would Lancelot in any way hear of his mother's death? Would it bring him home? She had a hope that Doctor Thorpe knew where Lancelot was. Surely he would write to him? In a few minutes she began to remember that Dick might meet Lancelot—that he might even try to find him. Looked at on the map Mexico did not seem such a very large country, and she had an idea that Dick had some unusual power or influence there.

She looked up at Dick. He was talking to Loida and Clara in an excited manner. The squire had gone to see Toro beyond temptation. He knew the gypsy's fingers stuck to a bridle. And yet he liked the brown Antinous. He had been born on Atherton moor, and was, in a fashion, one of his people.

"Come, Toro, I will walk to the gate with you," he said kindly, touching the gypsy on the shoulder.

"Too much honor for the poor person, squire." But Toro put his fiddle in its green baize bag, and laughingly rose.

"Doctor Dyson says you bought his horse—a bad brute he is."

"No, no, squire—badly managed. I know a horse

the minute I see him, temper and everything. The doctor's horse is quiet with me."

"Why did you walk into poor Hodgson's hen-house, Toro?"

"Did I, squire?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Because he is poor. I do not spare the poor person because he has little. No one is poor but them God hates. That is the Rommany creed."

"It is a wicked one. You promised, when I gave you a bit of land, to stay on it."

"The dog who travels about finds bones, squire."

"Are you sending your boys and girls to school?"

"In the highways and byways. Good-night, and good luck to you, squire. Did you fear I would put *dras* in your mangers? None of us would hurt Atherton or Atherton's horses."

"I know you do not wish to, Toro; but sometimes the devil—"

"The '*good baron*,' squire, must have the good word. He may be at our elbow."

"Speak for yourself, Toro."

But the squire laughed, and let the gypsy pass through the gate with the laugh, and as he turned toward the house the whole interview slipped from his memory like a vagrant thought. He felt a sudden melancholy assail him, and he quickened his footsteps and gladly re-entered the house. In the parlor Clara, Loida, and Dick were standing together on the hearth-rug, talking with great animation; but Francesca's face was upturned to the group with a shadow of pain upon it.

"Well, Dick, is it to be Mexico again?"

"Yes, squire, and at once. Loida is going with me."

"That is a nonsensical thing, Dick. It isn't a journey fit for a woman at all."

"Rashleigh, it is a lovely journey," said Clara. "There is no danger whatever, and very little discomfort. If you were not so full of business about the mill, I should ask you to take me also. What a splendid party it would be!"

Squire Atherton looked at his wife as a mother looks at a child who cries for the moon. He did not consider the supposition as a serious one.

"You see," continued Clara, "they have only to take a fine Cunard steamer to New York, and pray what danger or discomfort in that? None at all. I know, for I have crossed half a dozen times. From New York they can take a steamer to Mexico, or they can go to New Orleans and take a Mexican steamer from that port. As Dick and Loida had no wedding-trip, I think this journey together may just take its place. No one knows what kind of stuff his or her love is made of till they have tested it on a journey together. We came near to shipwrecking our good opinion of each other when we were on the continent once or twice. Eh, Rashleigh?"

"We did nothing of the kind, Clara."

"We certainly did, whether you know it or not. You were so English—so rampantly English—all through France and Germany, so tremendously Church-of-England in Rome, that any sensible cosmopolitan, any lover of human nature in all its charming variety, must have felt chafed and restricted. I did. But as fast as my

intelligence blamed, my heart excused you. For, upon the whole, Rashleigh, you were a most unselfish, delightful traveling companion. I only hope Loida may find Dick as really effective and sensible as you were. It is not likely, though."

And she gave Dick a deprecating sigh, and turned to her husband with the smile which always won her way, to his heart—which always put his wishes or his will under the feet of her least desire.

Loida had grown quite enthusiastic during the discussion. The squire looked at her heightened color and shining eyes with amazement. A year ago, a journey so far and so hurried would have been to the deliberate, methodical Englishwoman like a journey into an open grave. Now she was absolutely at Dick's desire.

"She could be ready in a week, in half a week, in twenty-four hours, if necessary."

"There is no time to lose, sir," said Dick to the squire. "From what I learn, an English company propose to buy the mine, in which I still hold a controlling interest. It will be a great thing for me. I shall then have all my money in England. I can buy land; I can build a new house, and take the place in the county that I desire to take."

And this last argument was one that always appealed to the squire. He was at once satisfied.

"Will you be long away, Dick?"

"Not longer than half a year, and, as Mrs. Atherton says, it will be a delightful trip. Loida will enjoy every hour of it. It is time the dear little woman saw something of the world she lives in."

"And what of your mother, Dick?" asked Francesca.

“What is to be done for Mrs. Alderson? How will she like your going away, and to Mexico again?”

There was a tone of reproach in Francesca's voice. At the moment it annoyed Dick.

“I have not forgotten mother,” he said, “and mother never puts herself before my interest. The letter went to Alderson, and she, seeing it was from Mexico, and marked ‘Immediate,’ sent Toro here with it. Mother will be glad to have Loida and me take a journey together, especially when the journey is a necessary one.”

Then the details of this journey furnished a long and interesting discussion. Clara knew so much about New York, and Dick knew nothing at all; so all Clara's directions and advices were to enter in his pocket-book. Dick knew everything about Mexico, but all his propositions were to discuss by the fresh element of womanly taste and requirements. And there are matters which require more time to discuss than to realize; it took Loida about three hours to resolve to take one trunk only with her; it did not take one hour to pack that trunk.

It was already morning when “good-nights” were said, and there was little sense of rest, even then, in the house. Francesca, on reaching her own room, could not find heart to unclothe herself. There was a harder look on her lovely face than it had ever known before; and perhaps it was not unreasonably there. For in all these discussions and suppositions, Lancelot had not once been named. Dick and Dick's fortune and Loida's comfort and pleasure had occupied all surmises, and been reason sufficient for every preparation. No one had even suggested the possibility of making a fresh search for her lover, on the very spot of his disappear-

ance, in the general enthusiasm over Dick's good fortune and the extraordinary event of Loida actually going to cross the ocean.

Her loving heart burned with indignation. She told herself that she had rejoiced with Dick and Loida, and that she had some right to expect they would at least remember she was weeping for her own loss. She felt as if every one did Lancelot injustice, as if every one willfully forgot him; yea, even at that moment she felt angry at his mother for deserting him. "I would have lived on in loneliness and suffering had I been in her place," she mused; "lived on, if only to pray for him, and to welcome him home again." Then the thought of the sorrow-haunted woman came to her with extraordinary power and sympathy. She was instantly contrite for her angry memory, instantly and strangely conscious of the agony that had consecrated every room of that old, empty house, which but a little while ago echoed to Lancelot's voice and step.

She could not keep her spirit at Atherton. It wandered away to Leigh, and to that forlorn little churchyard on the wold; and there, reluctantly compelled by some influence she could not escape, she remained—sleeping or waking the whole night she remained there—hesitating, trembling, mourning with every spiritual sense, feeling the dead that were below and the souls that were overhead.

Very early, while it was yet scarcely dawn, a tap at her door awakened Francesca from her troubled visions. She was glad to see it was Clara, glad to feel her living face, the touch of her warm lips, and the clasp of her soft, strong hands.

"I was unhappy about you, Francesca," said the pleasant, sympathetic woman, sitting down on the side of Francesca's bed. "I thought I heard you moaning in your sleep—somewhere far off—have you been dreaming badly, my dear?"

"Yes, all night; dreadful dreams."

"About Lancelot?"

"Not exactly. Do not speak of him."

"I have come purposely to speak of him. I have come to advise you to go to Mexico and seek him yourself. I would if I were you. No one should prevent me. Loida can go. Then you, also, can go."

"They never named him last night. They only thought of themselves."

"You cannot tell their thoughts, nor yet their reasons for not naming him. I, for instance, was quiet because I knew it was not the time to speak to your father, and I did not wish an ill-considered decision to prejudice a wiser application. But it is certain your presence will give diligence and interest to the search, and it is my belief love will find out whatever is hidden."

"What will people say?"

"Whom do you love? 'People' or Lancelot?"

"Will father let me go?"

"Ask him."

"If you would—"

"No; not unless you fail. There is a point which honor forbids me to cross. Your father will refuse me nothing. For that reason I cannot impose on his love. He has an affection still deeper for you. Test it this morning. You will find his love strong enough to grant you this favor, I make no doubt. Would you like to

go to Mexico? Lancelot disappeared from sight in that city. Will you trust to Dick and Loida making inquiries, or will you go yourself? What do you wish?"

"I wish to go. Clara, I wish with all my heart to go. Help me, dear! How shall I manage? What shall I do?"

"Go to your father. Tell him your desire. I will stand by you."

"I will! I will! Clara, thank you for coming. How blind, how stupid I am not to have thought of the plan last night."

"No, Francesca; the plan was one entirely out of your mental horizon. If a girl has been taught she must not see beyond her own four walls, she is hardly likely to suppose she can see across the Atlantic. I was taught to believe that the whole world and the fullness thereof was mine."

"O Clara, you give me such good hope! I feel happy—happier than I have felt for such a long time. I must get up. I cannot rest. I wish breakfast was over. Would it do to speak to father before breakfast?"

Clara thought it would be better to postpone the great question till the squire had got a good hold of himself, and was in a mood to regard the subject from his usual views, so that there would be no after-disputing. Then, with a few brave, kind words, she left the girl to think the matter over in her own heart.

The subject was not an entirely new one to Francesca. Many times such a project had flashed across her mind, but it had appeared too chimerical, too surrounded with insurmountable difficulties to entertain or

consider. It came and went like a flash, without apparent reason or result. But now it appeared to be the most reasonable of projects, and this change of feeling in some singular way influenced her physical bearing and appearance. In that hour *the touch* which removes immaturity was given; she looked no older, but she did look more perfect. When she went to the squire's room after breakfast, she went with a step and an air as yet new to herself; she went as a suppliant indeed, but as a suppliant conscious of rights.

The squire was smoking, and reading his newspaper. Francesca's presence was never an intrusion; he smiled to her over the top of the *Leeds Mercury*, and finished the editorial he was reading. Then he looked again at his daughter, and said:

"Art thou come to talk to me, love?"

"Yes, father. I want to go with Dick and Loida, and so I came to ask your permission."

"I never heard tell of such a thing! Does thou know what thou art saying? My love, it means crossing three thousand miles of stormy water, and, for aught I know, as many more miles when thou gets on the other side of the world. It means living with strange people, and sleeping in strange beds, and eating all manner and makes of strange dishes. From all that I ever read, or heard tell, when thou does get to Mexico thou wilt be in a country where no life is safe. Fighting and talk of fighting is all that goes on."

"Dick and Loida will take care of me."

"Happen they will, and happen they will not be able to take care of themselves. Surely thou art not in earnest?"

"Indeed I am."

"Well, then, I cannot listen to such sheer nonsense. I thought thou was joking. Go to Mexico! Thou must have lost thy senses."

"Father, I have been sad and sick for a long time. I have not been such a happy, pleasant daughter as you deserve to have."

"Thou hast not—that is the truth."

"It is about Lancelot. You know?"

"To be sure I know—I know too well."

"I think if I went with Dick and Loida, the sea would do me good. It would make me mentally and physically stronger. When I get to Mexico, I will see that Dick looks after Lancelot. I do not think Captain Benton ever did anything but spend money. I do not think Lancelot is dead; but if I myself can find out nothing, then I shall know *it is so*. That would be a great point. One can learn to accept the inevitable. It is the alternations of hope and despair that kill."

"To be sure. If Lancelot is found, what then?"

"I shall ask him to come home."

"Thou wilt not marry him, and stay in Mexico? That would fairly kill me."

"I will not."

"Because thou knows thou art my only child; thou art Lady of Atherton Manor; thou could not leave thy father and thy home and thy land, and the duty thou owes to each and all, just to please thyself. Thou could not do a thing like that, Francesca."

"I could not be Francesca Atherton and do such a thing. Lancelot must come back home if he wants to marry me. If he will not come home for my sake, do

you think I will wrong you and every one that loves me, and that looks to me, for his sake? No, father. I will then give him up forever. I will come home to you."

"And then thou wilt worry and fret thy life out."

"I will be a good daughter. I will then do all you wish me to do."

"God love thee! I will make no bargain with my own dear little lass. If I let thee go, I will let thee go freely; for no matter how things turned, I could not press a bargain with thee. Could I, Francesca?"

"No, my father. You would lose your last hope first."

"Now, then, listen, and don't thee be put out at what I say. I must help thee to look at every side of so important a question. It means so much to so many. Maybe then thou wilt find Lancelot easier than thou thinks for. Maybe thou wilt hardly know the man whom thou hast loved so truly. He has been living in one kind of a way, and thou hast been living in another kind of a way. Perhaps thou wilt meet an altogether different Lancelot to the image thou has nursed in thy own fond heart—a Lancelot thy high, pure nature could not love and could not trust. What would thou do in such a case as that?"

"If he came back to England must I not keep my word? I have no fear of Lancelot changing for the worse."

"Keep thy word? Not always. Circumstances alter cases. It is pretty easy to do blundering wrongs under the name of truth and honor."

"I never heard you talk in such a way before, father."

"Maybe not. I went with Clara into the village school the other day, and heard a lad saying some verses they call 'Casabianca.' Clara called them very silly verses, and I came to think she wasn't far wrong."

"Father!"

"Silly, and no mistake. Now, then, don't thee stand to a foolish promise, but get off the burning deck of an unhappy marriage without waiting for any orders but thy own. As Clara said: 'If that boy Casabianca had been a better sort of a hero, he would have known when to act under orders and when to use his own common sense.' There is a nobler way than mere stupid obedience. Nelson refusing to see his admiral's signal at the battle of Copenhagen was a bit of disobedience that meant glorious victory. My dear lass, there is a deal of be-praised Casabiancaism in this world, and there is no worse form of it than sticking to the promise of a marriage that has become unsuitable and is like to be unhappy. There would be more honor and truth in keeping off that kind of a burning deck than in standing by it. So if Lancelot found is not all thy fancy has painted him, just issue fresh orders to thyself. But I have not said yet that I would let thee go at all. I must talk to Clara about it. I do not know what she will say to such a move. I will tell thee plainly it is a very great trial to me only to think of parting with thee. But, my dear, I would lay my hands under thy feet to make thee happy. It must be something more than my own feelings that says 'No' to any wish of thine."

And, of course, Clara combated all doubts and fears and reluctances with a tact that left the squire without a single reasonable opposition. She would not admit

that the customs and traditions of other ladies of Atherton ought in any way to control Francesca's life. Francesca lived in a different period, surrounded by changing ideas and by changed circumstances. Old models would not fit her conditions; she was compelled to order her life to its own individuality. As for danger, Clara would not admit the possibility. She had been a great traveler; many ladies of her acquaintance had traveled still more. Slight inconveniences there might be, but it would be good for Francesca to have her thoughts diverted from the loss of her lover to little physical inconveniences.

"You know, squire," she said, "how pressing and absorbing such trials can be; for I once saw you fret for a whole week about the loss of your shaving-soap—on your wedding-trip, too!"

"She may come across that young man, Clara. Women are not only good seekers, they are good finders; and I do not wish her to meet him again."

"I never saw the young man, Rashleigh, and I cannot say I am much impressed in his favor. Any reason for his total silence, within the bounds of honor, seems to me improbable. I think, with you, that Francesca ought to do better. But it is necessary to get absolutely rid of this old lover before Francesca can be induced to consider a new one. I know something of Mexico. If young Leigh is in that country, he will not be easy to find. The Mexican dress is picturesque. No handsome man would deny himself the pleasure of adopting it. And his name will have suffered that change which Latin races delight themselves in making. The wisest way is to let Francesca go with her friends

Young girls believe their attachments to be immortal. They scout the idea that any material thing can influence them. My dearest husband, the sea air, the change of air, the fresh men and women, the wonderful cities, the new clothing to wear and the new viands to eat, will all insensibly blot out that sentimental idea which has been so well nursed by her seclusion among the very scenes and circumstances which gave it birth. When Francesca comes back, we will give her a season in London and marry her to a lord."

"I would rather she married a middling well-to-do Yorkshire squire."

"Very good. Then we will have fine house parties and bring some well-to-do young squires to her feet."

"My word, Clara! Thou can talk a man out of his boots."

"That is a poor compliment, Rashleigh, after I have talked a Yorkshire squire out of his heart."

And the squire drew himself up to his full inches, and a flush of pride and love covered his large, open face; and he bowed to his wife, as men have almost forgotten how to bow in these days—a noble inclination of both soul and body, a mingling of veneration, courtesy, high-breeding and a sincere desire to please—something very different from the casual nod or the passing tilt of the hat.

Half an hour afterward, Clara and Francesca were trying to decide upon the proper trunk for the Mexican trip, and the proper clothing with which to fill it.

CHAPTER XV.

IN SEARCH OF LOVE.

“Wise men ne’er sit and wail their loss,
But cheerly seek how to redress their harms.”

“For Love’s sweet sake they bid her stay;
She hung her head but answered straight—
‘For Love’s sweet sake I go my way.’”

WHEN a current of life sets strongly in one direction, it is remarkable how many smaller currents set in the same direction. Within two days there came a letter from Doctor Thorpe to Francesca, asking her if she could give him any information about Lancelot.

“The next heirs,” he said, “are already moving to get charge of the property, on the supposition that so long a silence indicates death.”

This letter set Clara to asking questions, and finally induced in her a strong belief that Doctor Thorpe was at least acquainted with the reasons for Lancelot’s strange and determined silence.

“And you ought to know these reasons, whatever they are,” she said, positively, to Francesca. “Indeed, my dear, they may be such as would justly prevent your seeking your lover, because a meeting might only be re-opening a wound. You must go and see Doctor Thorpe. You can go to Leigh this afternoon, stay with Mrs. Idle all night, and return to Atherton early

to-morrow. I dare say your father will like to drive you."

To this plan there were no objections made, and both father and daughter threw away all thought of their parting and endeavored to make the trip as charming to each other as possible. Doctor Thorpe's house was not far from Idleholme, and in the evening Francesca found him there and at liberty.

How is it that a bachelor's house can be known the moment it is entered? Everything was in the neatest order, but Francesca knew there was no wife in the tidy place. Doctor Thorpe sat by a large fire; he had his slippers on, and was reading and making notes from a folio on a table before him. He was a little astonished at Francesca's appearance, and said, with an air of apology:

"My dear young lady, a letter would have answered my letter."

"No, it would not, doctor. At least, I want to tell you something, and ask you something. I am going to Mexico to look for Lancelot—unless you know of any good reason why Lancelot and I ought never to meet again. If you do, in such a case as this I not only ask, I deserve, your confidence."

"Going to Mexico to look for Lancelot! My dear, let me kiss you for the thought! My dear, if I was not an old man I would kiss the feet that dare so sweet and true a pilgrimage! My dear, you should have lived a century ago. I will tell you the truth—the whole truth, for you do indeed deserve it. And may God send you and Lancelot together, for he is a good lad—a lad any good girl may safely love."

“Why has he never written to me? Why has he hid himself away? If there were reasons forbidding our marriage, he might at least have told me them. He might have come and bid me ‘farewell.’ He might have sent me occasionally some token of his remembrance.”

“When Lancelot left his home and his love, he believed that there were insurmountable obstacles to his marriage with you, not only at that time, but forever. He believed—” and then the doctor drew his chair close to Francesca’s and dropped his voice to its lowest key—“my dear, he believed that his mother was either an insane woman or a murderess. I had the same awful doubt. I had loved Martha Leigh as you love her son, and I understood what the young man suffered. My dear, he was the most hopeless and broken-hearted of men; and though he looked at me with such eyes as almost tempted me to say a word of comfort to him, I did not dare—at that time, to do so. *Now*, I am convinced of two circumstances which materially affect his position.”

“What are they, doctor? Surely you will tell them to me.”

“The first is that Martha Leigh was actually insane and quite irresponsible for her action; the second, that her insanity was an individual trait; she had no taint from her forefathers, and she transmitted none to her children. In fact, her insanity was the result of long-continued anxiety ever tending to the same end. The strain was too great upon certain faculties; indeed, my dear, when we try to see beyond the grave while still

on this side of it, we must either miserably deceive or fatally injure ourselves."

"She was insane, then, when Lancelot left?"

"She had undoubtedly lost her mental balance. But when Lancelot left, there was still so much method in her madness, she was so insistent on her own sanity, that it was impossible even for me to say, 'This woman is insane;' and yet equally impossible to say, 'This woman is practically a murderess, for she has of purpose and wicked intent withheld the medicines which would have saved her husband's life.' Do you understand what a cruel strait Lancelot was in then?"

"Yes! Yes! But was such absolute silence necessary?"

"I am sure it was the only wise and kind thing. What could he have told you? How could he have told you? Can a son accuse his mother? Would you have continued to love him if he had done so? And let me tell you that his utter silence is the expression of the noblest self-denial and self-effacement. If his life was ruined, he did not wish to ruin yours also. He hoped you would forget him, and love and be happy with some more fortunate lover. A small, selfish man would have demanded remembrance, if he had broken your heart to obtain for himself such consolation to his pride and self-love. Poor Lancelot! He was made of earth's best blood and noblest aspirations. Some men would have called his honor to his dead father and his refusal to touch a penny of what he believed ought still to have been his father's a very quixotic proceeding; I think he acted under the noblest impulse that

governs us—love grounded upon justice and honor. *Now—now*—he may wisely and lawfully be more worldlike. *Now* he may take what death has left him without a single reproach from his sensitive conscience.”

“May I tell my father these things? He has been a little set against Lancelot.”

“I do not blame him for being set against Lancelot. Any father judging in the dark would be. Yes, you may tell the squire. He has no small places in his make-up. When he sees the right, he will say the right.”

These were the main points of a conversation which lasted far into the night. Every fact and detail in it spoke to Francesca for her absent lover. She remembered Lancelot's great love for his father, she understood the living agony of the affectionate son in the presence of doubts so terrible—of love so tender. The tragedy was too great for realization at once, but it drove away sleep and compelled her through the long midnight hours to suffer all its pangs; not only with her lost lover, but with the lonely, unhappy mother, who had slowly died with her heart's unutterable longings and despairs unsatisfied and unlightened.

As they rode slowly back to Atherton, Francesca told her father with conscientious distinctness all that Doctor Thorpe had confided to her. The squire listened silently, bending slightly forward, with set lips and eyes cast resolutely down. But when all had been spoken, and she asked, “Do you blame Lancelot now, father?” he answered, “No! I do not blame Lancelot. I say he acted like a man of honor should have done. I am sure his mother was out of her mind.”

"And I remember that you thought her very queer on the day of her husband's funeral."

"On the day of Stephen Leigh's burying she behaved to me as no woman in her senses would have done. And I did wonder at it; because for simple worldly wit and plain common sense the Leighs, father and son, mother and daughter, have been known far and wide for many a generation. I have heard said since I was a boy 'that a bird out of Leigh's nest was always a wise bird; able to make its way, and to hold its day.'"

"Doctor Thorpe said she had become insane with fretting about Mr. Leigh's speculations endangering her home; and by encouraging the idea that she could see and talk with the dead."

"Poor woman! Maybe now she was born when those bad planets and the moon were opposing one another. Thou heard what Dick said about Saturn and Mars and Mercury, and I am very sure Mrs. Leigh was insane enough to have been born in the thick of their opposition. It is a queer world, Francesca, and what we do not know about it would make a big book, my dear."

"I thought I ought to tell you all that Doctor Thorpe said to me."

"To be sure. Thou would have been a poor daughter to have put such secrets out of my hearing. My dear girl, I trust thee like my own soul. The honor of thy name and of thy father's house is in thy hands. In England or Mexico, this side the world or the other, thou wilt remember that. The past has a lien on thee, and the future has a right in thee. No man and no

woman can live for themselves alone, unless they be selfish as the brutes that perish."

Then she lifted her face and kissed him, and he saw her pure, strong soul shining through her eyes, and he felt the assurance it gave him to be beyond all spoken words or oaths or written bonds. As soon as Francesca and the squire returned to Atherton, Dick and Loida went back to Alderson Bars, to complete their own arrangements. From Alderson they would go to Liverpool, and the squire and Clara promised to bring Francesca there to meet them. Between now and then there was only to be an interval of twelve days, but Clara said even that was ten too many. The small deliberations, the doubts evoked purposely to be talked away, the fears useless to combat while they were so far off, the small consultations about the care of clothing, the formal little notes of farewell to every acquaintance, the wonderful forethought about such trifles as pins, needles, and hair-dressing—all these petty incidentals of travel amused and a trifle annoyed a woman so ready and impulsive as Clara.

"A ticket taken and ten hours' notice, and I am ready to go round the world by the great Wall of China," she said; "and you are taking lots of things, Francesca, that you will throw away before you get back."

However, all events come and go whether we have patience or not, and the moment arrived for Francesca's last words of farewell. She said them with tears, with an undisguised emotion, with a desperate feeling that even at this final moment she must abandon her intention, and stay by the father whose blank, speechless

grief and anxiety were so pitifully evident through all his attempts at smiles and nods and waving kerchiefs.

The squire and Clara did not wait for the lifting of the anchor. The squire thought it was not lucky to watch those going away out of sight.

"If you do, they never come back again," he said, with a childlike pathos.

"Rashleigh, I do hope you are not superstitious—an observer of freits and signs." And Clara shook her head gravely.

"No, no, Clara! I am not superstitious; not a bit of it. But, then, it is just as well to have the signs on the right side. Eh, my dear?"

She laughed, and turned the conversation on Loida.

"How complacently cheerful and satisfied she looked upon Dick's arm! Did you notice her, Rashleigh? Her whole air seemed to say: 'Look at Dick Alderson—at *my* Dick Alderson! Consider Dick's wisdom and Dick's bravery and Dick's knowledge of everything. Did ever any husband love his wife as much as Dick loves me? Were ever any couple happy before? Does not every sensible person wish to be as Dick and I are?' Women who marry late in life are such fools about their husbands."

"Clara, when you married me, you were—"

"I know, Rashleigh—I know. I was a fool, also, about my husband. I thought you handsomer than you are, and better than you are. I invented for you all the good qualities which nature had not given you. Yes, I was decidedly foolish about you."

The jolting of the cab and its rattle over the cobblestones broke the confession into charming little bits.

In spite of his gloomy forebodings, the squire could not help smiling. He felt bound, also, to defend Loida's absorption in her husband.

"She suffered a deal for him, Clara," he said, "and she lost ten years of her love-life. She has to make it up some way, my dear. Think of that."

"I do reflect upon these things, Rashleigh; and Loida is really a very delightful woman, besides being, in her present state of Dick-adoration, a most sensible companion for Francesca. She will talk of Dick and wonder about Dick a good deal; and that is a great deal better than an hourly canonization of the young Saint Lancelot. How dismal is this dismal square, and the old yellow church, and the rain trailing down the dirty windows! How dreadful is black rain and bleak winds inclosed between stone houses!"

"Let us be thankful we have got under cover. Now, then, draw the blinds and come to the fire. It is very cheerful."

Clara laughed.

"An open fire," she said, "is an Englishman's fetich; he thinks it ought to give comfort under all circumstances." But she put a chair before the blaze and tried to fall into her husband's mood of concentration, and she soon found herself discussing with animation the probabilities of the little drama at which they had both been assisters and spectators.

"It is possible they may come across Lancelot Leigh, but not at all probable. We will consider first the possible. Suppose, Rashleigh, that Lancelot is found; suppose Francesca and he are married, then what is to be done with them? After marriage comes housekeep-

ing; and young men who go away to seek a fortune never find one."

"Lancelot has his father's estate. There is no reason why he should not take possession of it. He can sell the mill property for a pretty sum at this time; and the house—"

"It would be a crime to sell the house. Besides, that poor old woman could never rest in her grave if such a thing was done. I think the feelings of the dead ought to be consulted a little. You would resign the mill at Atherton to Lancelot?"

"Most gladly. I am running the mill for the sake of the village, not for the profits."

"There is the Dower House. It is a pretty spot, and upon Atherton ground, Rashleigh."

"My dear, when I die that is your house, and—"

"Indeed, it is not my house, sir. Do you imagine I could subside into a second-rate dowager? If I am so unhappy as to survive you, I have my own house in Boston, United States of America. I shall go to it at once."

"Then the Dower House can be refurnished and beautified. Lancelot had a wish to buy more land, and it is not right for the lady of the manor to live away from the manor."

"Francesca has not yet come to her kingdom. 'I am Lady of Atherton Manor at present. There cannot be two at the same time; so that is no reason for putting Leigh House out of consideration. It is a pretty old place, and it has associations that no money can buy. Francesca has told me about its fine rooms full of sad consciousness. She said she could shut her eyes and

fancy shadows walking quietly about them, every one in dark garments and wearing their veils so great and long."

"Hush, my dear! Thou makes me feel creepy and eerie as can be."

"And the queer old garden, too, with its zigzag ways and its somber clusters of shrubs, its twisted trees and strange plants. Francesca fancied she heard voices behind them and strange words and weird trembling—"

"Wilt thou be quiet, Clara? Now, then, let us talk of the mill and something this-worldlike—*other worldliness* is none of our business yet."

"Very well, Rashleigh. I suppose it is the fire makes me remember such things—the fire is full of dreams. Or perhaps it is the pattering outside, or those dismal church-bells, or that most wretched woman's voice, singing love-songs in the storm, the while she is starving for a crust of bread. Open the window and give her a shilling. Poor soul! If you want something *this-worldlike*, I am sure she will do."

The squire obeyed his wife's wish, and then sat down with a sigh.

"Francesca is far out at sea now," he said, "but she will return in six months, eh, Clara?"

"In six months she will return, cured of the Leigh fever—or at least convalescent—or she will come back Leigh-forever! In the first case, we must carry her to pastures new for new lovers."

"And in the second, what then, Clara?"

"There is a choice of Atherton Mill and the Dower House, or of Garsby Mill and the old Leigh home. Is there not a choice?"

“Not yet, not yet, Clara. Whatever is the use of handicapping fate by forespeaking it? I’m very tired. Day and day is quite enough. Let six months alone. That is what I say, eh, Clara?”

“You are right, Rashleigh; day and day, and the comfortable night to round each day with a blessed sleep.”

CHAPTER XVI.

AND NOW LOVE SANG!

“White-handed Hope,
Thou hovering angel girt with golden wings!”

“Who, as they sang, would take the prisoned soul
And lap it in Elysium.”

Such sober certainty of waking bliss!—*Milton.*

For all we know
Of what the blessed do above
Is that they sing, and that they love.—*Waller.*

FAR out at sea! The squire had remembered the fact with a quick, sick terror of heart; and at the same moment Francesca was beginning to realize the full importance of the step she had taken. She sat in her solitary state-room like a child cast adrift from home and love, and she was afraid of the dark ship and the moaning winds and the breaking of the waves against her temporary shelter. The water was so close to her—only a plank between her and eternity!

At that hour she was too much depressed and too much terrified to remember how much in love she was. Her father and her dear home, and the orderly, calm life to which she was accustomed was the supreme craving of her heart. Some days of inert misery followed, and then the worst was over; a brilliant sunshine, an atmosphere charged with oxygen and ozone soon

made life not only possible but also full of anticipated delights.

And after the infinite monotony of nine days at sea, how charming, how wonderful was the first glimpse of that great city rising, as it were, out of it! It was also the happy month between Thanksgiving and Christmas, and New York was wearing all her holiday decorations, and displaying all her beauty and all her wealth.

There had never been the least supposition that Lancelot had drifted so far north as New York, yet Francesca felt herself to be ever on the watch. The comers and goers in the hotel, the gay company in the theaters, the loitering crowd on the main thoroughfares, were under her constant inspection. It was impossible to say in what place Lancelot might be found; therefore she would seek him wherever her footsteps led her, and surely love would bring them in some happy hour together.

But New York had nothing to tell her and nothing to give her, and as far as Lancelot was concerned Washington and New Orleans were equally destitute of hope and comfort. However, as Dick said: "No one had the least expectation of either meeting with or hearing of Lancelot in the United States. The young man had gone to Mexico, he had been heard from in Mexico, and it was his opinion he would be found in some small interior village of that country."

And Francesca answered:

"To be sure. She did not expect anything until Mexico was reached."

And Loida pitied her effort to smile, knowing that her heart was heavy and anxious, and that home-sickness and love-sickness were striving hard within it.

At length they were in Vera Cruz, that melancholy city of unfinished and decaying grandeur. Dick was now quite at home. Francesca thought she had never seen him so important, so full of a pleasant authority, so very much Señor Alderson. He assumed again a semi-Mexican costume; he spoke the language with a fluency and a force that astonished the ladies. Indeed, Loida timidly suggested "she believed Dick was really swearing at the servants; she hoped he was not, but it sounded very like it."

Dick only smiled at a still more pointed inquiry on this subject, though he was rather inclined to volunteer information of all kinds to his companions. And as it was not the bad season, he was enabled to show them the city, with its domes of various colors, its grand cathedral, its steeples shooting up into the air, its large, gloomy houses, with their massively grated balconies. The rich, picturesque dresses of the men of all grades and of the lower orders of women added greatly to the Eastern look of this far Western city. And after sunset there was something dreamlike and mysterious in the quiet streets. For then the presence of the noble and wealthy women was revealed by the murmur of voices, the rustling of fans, and the white-robed beauties—blanched by the rays of the moon—sitting behind half-opened Venetian blinds.

But though Dick went carefully over the ground already examined by Captain Benton, nothing new was discovered. Lancelot had stayed two days at the hotel San Juan de Ulloa, and had then gone forward to Bocca del Rio. Here his stay had been short, but it was proven that there he had become intimate with a

Mexican lawyer, and that they had gone forward together to the gorges of Cerro Gordo and the great bridge over the river Antigua, called the Puente Nacional. At this point they separated, the lawyer returning to Vera Cruz, and Lancelot going forward to Lancero. Then Dick found out the lawyer, but he could tell him nothing that was not already known.

So the party went forward to Lancero, where they rested for some days; for here the sight of the oak-tree announced to the travelers that they had passed the region of fever and pestilence. Loida was exceedingly depressed and weary with the constant excitement and change. She was suffering from climatic influences, also, and life seemed impossible to her until she had recovered strength to take a fresh hold upon its strange and many-colored threads. Francesca was singularly well. A feeling of expectancy upheld her. At Lancero Lancelot had remained a week. Here there were plenty of traces of the young man. At the *venta* where he had lodged the host and his wife remembered him well. He had bought a horse there, and had become familiar with the people in the *jacales*. Also, he had been entertained by the officer in charge of Santa Anna's country-house at Lancero, and Francesca went with Dick to the little building, with its red-stained walls and modest veranda surmounted by a belvedere of glass. She sat in the chair Lancelot had used, and Dick translated for her such of the conversation as the man remembered.

Hope grew apace in such favorable conditions. At last she began to feel that her pilgrimage of love was not predestined to sorrow and fatigue and failure. Here

also they procured a *litera*, or kind of palanquin, in which Loida and Francesca passed over the *Tierra Caliente*, or Burning Land, between this part of the road and Jalapa, where they arrived one day about noon. For the first time since they had left the United States Loida and Francesca were enthusiastic, and forgot their small personal interests in the beauty of the place and its environs.

For Jalapa, with all its enchantments, was upon them—the steep streets, with the blue and red houses peeping out of clumps of guava trees, of liquid-ambar and palms; the hedges of datura and jasmine and honeysuckle; the mountains overhanging the town; the rocks covered with convolvuli; the thousand streams from their sides; the deep blue of the sky and the deep blue of the hills blending into one. Surely, if there was a heaven for love on this earth, it was here—here at fair Jalapa.

At the “Posada Francesca,” Francesca was sensible of that conviction of desire accomplished which so often ends in disappointment. She was sure Lancelot had lodged in this very house. Its name of “Francesca” would make it dear and attractive. She stepped happily through the piazzas surrounding the spacious court, and watched the bubbling fountain in its center to thoughts of Lancelot. Doubtless he had stood there, and thought of her.

But there were no positive traces of Lancelot at Jalapa. And, after a short rest, the travelers took advantage of an American coach running between Jalapa and the City of Mexico. At every stopping-place inquiries were made, and at Las Vegas and Perote

there were some doubtful memories of the young man; but it seemed hopeless to look for anything definite nearer than the capital.

Francesca had become depressed. She spent all her time in studying the language of the country, but her heart had deceived her at Jalapa, and she had now no confidence in its monitions. When love's labor is continually lost, love is at last conscious of a sense of weariness and of succumbing to fate.

In the City of Mexico they found an American hotel, and gladly made their stay there. Dick was now at the point where both his own affairs and Francesca's would be likely to detain him for some weeks, and the ladies endeavored to give to their rooms as distinctively a home air as was possible. Then life assumed a somewhat regular aspect. Every morning Dick attended to the mining business which had brought him to Mexico, and which was delayed by the absence of a person important to its settlement. In the cool of the day he wandered about the city, penetrating into all the favorite haunts of the *leperos*, or Mexican *lazzarone*. For Dick was certain that some of this class knew the fate of Lancelot, if assassination had terminated it.

And as soon as his business permitted the temporary absence, he resolved to go to the San Lepato mines. He had indeed written there, and received an answer which contained a hope he did not think it wise to give Francesca; because he was aware of the difficulties encompassing the recognition of an Englishman, who, if there at all, had speedily left, and who understood very little that was said to him. Indeed, the many doubts thrown around the visitor presumed to be Señor Leigh

appeared to Dick to far outweigh any likelihood of assured information.

He had resolved to go alone to San Lepato, but he found Loida and Francesca had quite determined to see the mines, and it was in vain he represented to them the mountains they must climb or the many dangers and fatigues of the *canada* they would be required to traverse. Both women were sure they could "go wherever Dick could go"; and Francesca's face brightened with delight at the idea of proving her affection by her fortitude in weariness, by her contempt for her own comfort and safety, and her resolution to discover her lover at all risks.

"He would be most likely to disguise himself," she said; "he might even change his name; but under any disguise and under any name, I should find him out."

And after all, the journey was not so very fatiguing. The season being early, there was some suffering from cold; but the air was so vivifying, and such perfect arrangements had been made for their rest and refreshment, that all declared the journey to San Lepato had been, as yet, the most delightful part of their trip. Yet toward the close of it they were obliged to go very slowly, while their mules with cautious steps picked their way over the crests of lofty hills, or else to deep gullies where towering cliffs darkened the noonday. But which way soever they rode, they crossed frequently veins of precious ore, marked even at the superficies of the ground by a red oxide of silver streaking the clefts of the rocks, as bright as a trail of cinnabar.

The scene affected the whole party profoundly. Francesca found it impossible to converse. A deep

solemnity hushed her heart and closed her lips. Loida answered Dick's remarks in a low voice. Dick only asked such questions as his care for their safety and comfort required. They were in one of Nature's grand cathedrals, they felt the presence of the Infinite, and their souls said reverently: "How awful is this place!"

At length they reached the mines. The director had been notified of the visit, and every preparation possible had been made for their comfortable accommodation. Dick was at home. He showed Loida the little hut in which he had lived so many years, his office, his old books of accounts, and a great number of the miners who had worked under his orders, and who received him with noisy delight.

Then such mementos as had been left by visitors were examined; and finally the director remembered a slip of paper upon which two gentlemen had written their names. It was found, and given to Dick; and the two names were Lancelot Leigh and Richard Gilleland. Then the director, being urged to remember all he could concerning these gentlemen, said that "he was sure they only remained two days. The younger of them had gone down the mine unto the third gallery, and had then been so ill that it was with danger and difficulty he had been brought to the surface."

"It was the young *señor* who fainted. He fainted when the sunshine fell again upon him. His friend took him away the next morning."

"It was doubtless Lancelot," said Francesca. "He loved the sunshine. He would faint and perish in the gloom and death-air of a living pit. It was surely

Lancelot! I would have said so even if he had left no name behind him."

Nothing further could be learned. Many visitors came to the mines, and went down them as a matter of curiosity. They excited no particular interest, excepting for the amount of gratuity left for the poor miners. These two gentlemen had been very generous, and the *paistres* they donated had become the measure by which all future gifts had been counted; and this circumstance had preserved a clearer memory of their personal appearance.

Inquiries among the miners who had seen them left no kind of doubt in the mind of Francesca as to one of the visitors being Lancelot. "A beautiful young man, with a sad face, who walked like an emperor."

How could it be any one else? Vague as the description was, it satisfied Francesca; and she was sure she was now treading the very places where Lancelot's feet had been.

She wished to go down the mine as far as Lancelot had gone. Dick could not frighten her from the intention. "Had ladies ever gone so far?" Dick was obliged to confess that "a party of American ladies had gone even two galleries deeper."

"Very well, then, Dick, I am certain to go as far as Lancelot went," said Francesca. "When we do meet, Lancelot will understand the feeling which led me to follow him. At the point he turned, my mind may catch the thought of his mind; and my soul may feel after his soul, and I may divine whether he went north or south or east or west."

Never had Francesca been so set upon any move-

ment as upon this descent into the San Lepato. And in a few hours her enthusiasm had stimulated Loida, so that these two timid Englishwomen, who a year ago had been in the dark afraid of a walk about their own house and garden, were now eager to explore the galleries of a mine hundreds of feet below the ground.

There were some points in the descent favorable for them. The mine was a dry one, and when Dick had been its superintendent, he had substituted railed ladders for the uncouth piece of notched wood which had been the only road down to the depths, and up to the daylight. And the strength of their race was in the two women. They had determined to see the mine, and they demanded of their souls to be strong enough for the task they had undertaken. Dick found them dressed for the visit, pale but resolute, cheerful and quite calm.

The mine was entered by a horizontal gallery. After walking three hundred yards along it they came to the first perpendicular shaft; and as shaft succeeded shaft in a slantwise position the lights that shone from the bottom of the mine could be partially seen at the top of the first shaft; besides which the ascending miners, each with a candle in his helmet, made a singular moving glow that faintly indicated the loaded gnomes passing up and down.

Dick went first, Loida followed. Then Dick returned for Francesca. No word was spoken. They stood still together on the first gallery. Gigantic shadows trembled over the walls. Great vaults stretched away into the darkness. Rough, glittering pilasters sustained them, and the noise of footsteps reverberated in the

somber caves. From time to time lights struggled through the deep gloom, the head-lights of the miners, whose long, floating hair and bronzed, nearly naked bodies looked gigantic, ominous, supernatural.

At the bottom of the second shaft a singular sight arrested their steps, and made them feel the thrill of emotions that touch another world. In a square of glittering rocks the miners had constructed a rude chapel; an altar, lighted by several wax tapers, was in the center, and a large cross of pure silver, bearing the image of *The Crucified*, was upon it. Kneeling on the very steps of this altar was an old man, whose long, white hair flowed down upon his naked breast and shoulders. He was lost in adoration. He perceived not the presence of strangers. Suddenly he stood upright and began to chant:

“ ‘*Santo Dios, santo puerto, santo imortal,
Libra nos, señor, de todo mal,*’ ”

and instantly his companions in the rocky caverns joined in the solemn melody until it echoed and reverberated through the whole mine, so that even the lowest *labor* was vocal with prayer and praise.

“ Out of the depths they call unto Him!” said Loida softly. Francesca’s hands were dropped and clasped, her head bent, her eyes closed. She was experiencing one of those divine *Intimacies* which are the blessed earnest of our immortal destiny.

Dick was less moved; the scene was familiar to him, but its familiarity had never induced indifference. He said, with considerable feeling:

“ It is the ‘*Agios o Theos agios ischiros!*’ of the Greek

Church. Is it not enough? Higher than all creeds, far above all superstitions?"

After a short pause Francesca said, "Let us go back," and they went very quietly back to the visible earth and sunshine.

The next day they began to retrace their steps to the City of Mexico. A great despondency had fallen upon Francesca. Loida perceived that hope in her heart was dying. The gayeties of the metropolis gave her no pleasure, and she ceased to make inquiries of Dick as she used to do. Either she did not believe in his exertions, or she had accepted the idea of a final separation from her lover. Dick felt her attitude to be a little provoking. He knew that he had done everything possible to trace the young man, and he also knew that Francesca only half believed that everything had been done.

At length his own business was settled, and there seemed to be no further reason for delay. Loida, though she had thoroughly enjoyed her trip, was beginning to think of her English home. It was April, and she could not help saying continually in her heart:

" 'Oh, to be in England,
Now that April 's there!
And whoever wakes in England
Sees some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs of the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree's bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough,
In England now.' "

One day, when Dick was feeling that a move homeward must no longer be delayed, he met in the lobby of

the hotel an American, who pleasantly accosted him, and then added :

"Had you stayed another day at San Lepato, we might have traveled in company."

"You have been at San Lepato, then?"

"Yes. I saw your names in the director's office. It is a little singular how many Yorkshire people go there. The last time I went to Lepato I went with a Yorkshire gentleman."

Dick was on the alert instantly.

"A Mr. Lancelot Leigh, I suppose?"

"That was the name, sir. I had the pleasure of saving his life and helping him to a sort of settlement. A very nice young man, I think."

"Saving his life! In what way had he put his life in danger?"

"In the most innocent way in the world. He was at Guadaloupe at the time of the feast of Our Lady of Guadaloupe. So was I. When the holy image of the Virgin, preceded by the Host, appeared, Mr. Leigh stood and gazed at it."

"That was natural enough."

"But it was construed by the populace as an insult to their faith and to the Mexican people, and the muttered curses at his attitude soon grew to cries of indignation and to drawing of stilettoes. Mr. Leigh was quite ignorant that he ought to have prostrated himself, and that his failure to do so was an offense worthy of death."

"How did you make peace?"

"I knew the people and the language, which Mr. Leigh did not, and with great difficulty I explained his ignorance. But the stubborn fellow would not do hom-

age to Our Lady of Guadalupe, even to save his life, and my task was only accomplished by promising an enormous gratification in money for the offense."

"How much did he have to pay?"

"He paid nothing. As soon as the procession had passed on, we rode for our lives northward, and did not stop until the Lepato mines were reached. Mr. Leigh expected to find a friend there, but he had left the mines when we arrived."

"Did you stay there any length of time?"

"No. Mr. Leigh thought he might be secure in the mines, but he found himself unable to endure their heat and gloom. Indeed, he was made ill by a very short experience of their horrors, and he declared that not for all the silver coined from them would he remain twenty-four hours in their depths."

"Can you tell me in what direction he went after leaving San Lepato?"

"He went to Texas in my company. I parted with him in San Antonio. I should not wonder if he bought land in that vicinity. He was powerfully taken with that part of the country. Never saw a man who, generally speaking, went more naturally to camping out and using a rifle."

"Your name is Richard Gilleland?"

"Yes, sir, that is my name. I have no occasion to shirk it." He was a sallow, long-haired, fiercely whiskered man, whose great bell-spurs tinkled to his long steps, and made a soft chime to the ring of coins on the bar counter.

"Do you really think he is now living near San Antonio?"

"Why do you wish to know, stranger? I would be sorry to get any man into trouble. I would be particularly sorry to trouble Lancelot Leigh."

"I am his friend. I am seeking him in order to make him happy."

"Then I should say: Seek him within a hundred miles of San Antonio. I do not know for sure he is there, but I would feel myself as likely as not to come across the gentleman in that direction."

This information seemed to be the most positive yet received, but Dick was not sure whether he ought to tell Francesca. One hope after another had proved false, and she was beginning to believe that she would never see Lancelot again. It appeared to be a kind of cruelty to unsettle the resignation she was trying to attain to by a hope which might prove as futile as all preceding it.

He did not even tell Loida, for he knew that, sooner or later, Loida would reveal all to Francesca. His business relations and necessities had already frequently proved a most elastic and convenient reason for any movement he thought it best to make. All other reasons Loida and Francesca argued and modified to suit their own wishes; but business reasons they had a profound respect for. To submit to them was a necessity of their sex and their fortune. So Dick calmly announced that his business compelled him to go to San Antonio. He said, if the ladies wished, he would take them to New Orleans and leave them there, while he made alone the Texan journey. Or, if they would like a camping-out trip, nothing could be more charming in the spring of the year than a leisurely journey across the Texan prairies.

Loida perceived that Dick wished the latter course. She considered it very natural he should do so, for it permitted Dick to have her with him. She was instantly and warmly in its favor; and as Dick went on to describe the arrangements he would make for their comfort, she became enthusiastic.

"Will it not be charming, Francesca?" she cried. "We are to have horses when we wish to ride and a *cariole* when we wish to take a rest. Think of it! Riding through miles and miles of flowers and waving grass, in the exhilarating atmosphere of Texas, with its glorious blue sky above us! And Dick will get an army tent and lots of blankets and mattresses and a commissary wagon and a good cook, and we shall have the whole State of Texas for a bedroom and a dining-room."

"I wish to go home as quickly as possible now, Loida. I do not wish to go to Texas. I wish to go to England. I am so tired of travel."

"How can you be tired? And it is possible we may find Lancelot in Texas. I should think after Mexico his first thought would be Texas."

"I wish you would not speak of Lancelot. Finding him is becoming a wearisome farce, Loida. I wonder that I was ever beguiled by it. I am tired of promises that always fail."

She spoke with some temper, and Loida thought her very unjust.

"I am sure," she answered, "everything, *yes, everything*, possible has been done. Is it Dick's fault that Lancelot has hid himself so well?"

"I did not say it was any one's fault. I wish I was

a man! I wish Clara had come with us! She thinks of so many things."

"I am sure, Francesca, you are very ungrateful. Dick has put himself to a great deal of trouble."

"I am much obliged to Dick."

She was indifferent, and she shrugged her shoulders in a way which angered Loida, as far as it was possible for that placid lady to feel anger. Dick said nothing. He was not in the least offended with the disappointed girl. He understood better than Loida did that she was more angry at her fate than dissatisfied with him. He could feel that she had come to a point when she felt even Lancelot's name to be an offense. If people could not help her in deeds, then words were as well unspoken. This was her present mood, and Dick sympathized with it.

So he said not a word of the fresh hope. He only so moved Loida's imagination that she was delighted at the idea of going back to England by way of Texas, and Francesca acquiesced in that spirit which silently declares all things to be equally indifferent. Sometimes, when Dick saw her hopeless eyes and listless manner, he was tempted to give her the encouragement he was acting upon, but at the end he always resisted the temptation. For Dick had his superstitions, as all men have, and he believed that it is in silence hope grows to fruition.

"You may talk away the good fortune of anything you purpose to do. I will be quiet and see what comes of silence." And upon this resolve Dick acted.

For several weeks nothing came of it. Through an earthly paradise they traveled day after day, and Francesca was not able to resist the vivifying airs and sun-

shine and the ineffable peace and glory of a Texas spring. In spite of all her sorrow she grew light-hearted. She was in such radiant health she could not, even if she tried, be sorrowful. In the mornings she and Loida cantered by Dick's side, singing together, for the very joy of living. In the evenings they spread their blankets amid the flowers and grass, and talked happily till they fell into sweetest slumber. They traveled very slowly, being only anxious to make the journey last as long as possible.

Very frequently they camped at night near some cattleman's cabin, or some camp of soldiers or rangers. Then they had visitors, and the sound of the violin or guitar, and the hearty chorus of men singing with all their hearts, filled the great still places, and made even Silence pleased to listen to their glad music.

At length the delightful journey was nearly over. They were within a few hours of San Antonio. To-morrow they would become conventional beings again. They would bid the great sweet heart of Nature "good-bye" and go back to the restless life of men and women.

This last night, therefore, they resolved to taste every moment of a joy so soon to vanish.

The sun set as they finished supper and sat down beneath the wide-spreading live-oaks. A full, golden moon was rising to the zenith. The white asphodels shone like stars all over the prairie. A mocking-bird was singing, and stopping, and then beginning again. A Mexican lying alone was singing softly to a mandolin. Others were playing cards; and one silent, dark Jarocha from Vera Cruz was kneeling apart, making a "*novena*" for his "*dearly-beloved angel on earth.*" Dick was smoking,

and Loida sat beside him, with her head against his shoulder.

Francesca's heart was like the moon at full. She was thinking of Lancelot as she had not lately permitted herself to think—with love and hope—with a certainty of seeing him—with a devotion that she felt to be only strengthened by disappointment and delay. Lately she had absolutely forbidden herself to speak of her lover, but as they sat in the divine, soul-subduing light, she began to recall in a gentle voice the days that were gone.

"They will come no more, Loida," she said tenderly; "and though I am almost compelled to think of Lancelot as dead, yet to-night I feel it a joy to hope that he may be alive."

"My dear Francesca, you must remember those who love you and who are certainly living. Your father—"

"Ah, Loida! Do not think you need to plead for my father. I promised him when I returned, if Lancelot was not found, to be his good, loving daughter. I mean to be so. It will give me pleasure to make his pleasure."

"He will think of a marriage between you and Almund—and Almund, I am sure, desires it."

"My father will hold his little daughter to no heart-bargaining. I shall say to him frankly: 'My dear, I cannot love any one but Lancelot. Living or dead, I can only love Lancelot. Let me stay near you alway.' And I know he will answer: 'God love thee, Francesca! God gave thee, and God forbid I should send thee away.' My father will not bend me either this way or that way. He can trust to my honor and my affection, as I can trust to his."

"But, my dear, there is the estate. You ought to marry for the house and the land."

"I will tell you a secret that Clara told me before I left. When I get home I may have a sister—I may even have a brother! Think of that, and of my father's joy!"

Loida did not answer. She could not bear to think, at first, of her niece as anything less than Lady of Atherton Manor. The secret made a slight embarrassment, and Francesca rose and walked away into the broader moonlight. Every little asphodel had a supernatural beauty in it. Angels might have thought them flowers of heaven and taken them by handfuls. They made Francesca remember that glorious harvest night when Lancelot gathered the August lily and sang her the song that was all her own; and she set her feet carefully between the white buds, for she had put into each a golden memory, and she would not crush it.

Let no one say nature has no voice of comfort. That exquisite hour was eloquent of hope. The asphodels said to her, "*He will come!*" The mocking-bird sang, "*He will come!*" The lover with the mandolin in his hands and the lover with the rosary in his hands moved her to their own hope. Her heart swelled to the beaming moon, and whispered her, "*He will come!*" A strong, sweet conviction swept away all doubt and fear. She smiled to its promise. She stretched out her arms. She whispered to the secret, sacred intelligences around her:

"O my love! My love! Send him to me!"

Then suddenly, out of the space beyond, there came a wonderful voice—a clear, silvery snatch of song—that

was distinct from all other sounds. It thrilled the moonlit atmosphere as if it had been vibrant. It moved Francesca as if a hand had touched her. She lifted her head and looked all around. There was nothing to be seen, but the voice was coming nearer. A little wood of pecan-trees was to the right; she turned to it, and as she did so a horseman came from out its shadow. He stood still in the broad moonshine; he lifted his hat, and let the cool gulf-wind stir his hair, and as he sat motionless, looking to the horizon, he sang:

“ ‘ *Then it would not seem miles
Out to the emerald isles:
I should be there as soon
As the white birds at noon;
Blue night and golden moon
Rising o’er me.* ’ ”

As she listened her soul cried out with wonder and joy. If this was not Lancelot, then she had never loved him. No voice but Lancelot’s could make her heart so beat and tremble with rapture. She was impelled by the spirit of love within her. Forward, into the broad, white moonshine, she passed swiftly as a bird, and singing as she had never sung before. Her hands were outspread, her face was uplifted, and the melodious words left her lips as if each word cried: “*Lancelot!*”

“ ‘ *Have you seen but a bright lily grow
Before rude hands have touched it?* ’ ”

The horse leaped forward, then it was instantly still; his rider was intently listening. And Francesca went steadily toward him, singing as she went.

“It was Francesca! It was impossible! He must

see her! He must fly!" Such thoughts went like fire through his brain and heart. "What should he do? What should he do?"

Oh, what use to ask himself? He could see her face! He could hear her! Feel her! She came closer! He ran with outstretched arms to meet her. The song was silenced against his beating heart. He kissed its melody off her lips. For very rapture they could not say each other's names. They were weeping for purest joy. And all over them the moonshine fell like a silvery cloud, and all around them the soft winds blew the scents of flowers and the low sounds of love; and they were held some moments in a speechless trance—an elysium of supernal joy. It was in broken words of infinite tenderness they began at length to speak:

"I was thinking of you, dearest!"

"I was looking for you, beloved!"

"Francesca!"

"Lancelot!"

"Oh, Heaven!"

"Oh, love! Oh, joy!"

Then Loida, in the shadow of her tent, grew restless, and she said:

"Where is Francesca?"

And Dick rose and looked into the moonshine, and asked, with a kind of triumph:

"But who is with her?"

"Dick, it is Lancelot! Lancelot at last!"

And earth must coin the words of heaven to tell the heartful exaltation of the hours that followed. Who thought of sleep? Who dreamed that morning could ever come? Transported, ravished with perfect love—

with sorrow turned into perfect joy—with doubt turned into ecstasy—they watched the dawn come up the east, while they were still telling each other how they had loved—how they had trusted and never faltered, because they knew right well—

“Though Fate may part,
And seas may sever,
Love for an hour
Is love forever!”

THE END.

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